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Secondary students at risk of permanent exclusion who succeed

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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Secondary students at risk of permanent exclusion who succeed

Abstract

This thesis attempts to provide an understanding of the factors and issues influencing the success of students at risk of permanent exclusion from school. It is a single-site study and involves insider research. Research suggests that positive teacher-student relationships can serve as a protective factor to such students. Positive student-student relationships were also identified as a protective factor. Narratives collected from permanently excluded students suggest that the experiences of relationships with both adults and students in school are an important component for inclusion. A qualitative approach using narrative inquiry was used. Semi-structured interviews and animated interviewing techniques were chosen to draw out students' school experiences and to discover their views on what had helped them succeed. Participants were screened for at-risk factors and their Year 11 progress and post-16 destinations were tracked. Students were selected for the research based on their at-risk factors and subsequent success at national examinations at 16 years of age. Results indicate the significance of the development of positive student-teacher relationships as a protective factor for students at risk of permanent exclusion. Such relationships can be an enabler for students faced with myriad challenges inside and outside school. The research also suggests that students are decision-makers inside this process, choosing behaviours that lead to inclusion. The research was carried out in a secondary school (students of 11 to 18 years of age) in London, England.

Dedication

*I dedicate this study to the
Headteacher of our school who made it all
possible by championing professional study
and promoting our supportive and
inclusive environment.*

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I would like to thank my wife, Christina, and young daughter, Emily, for putting up with my many hours away from them during this study. Their encouragement and support helped me through the many hours spent, face in books or trying to write in a way that justifies this level of study. I am greatly indebted to Carl Parsons, my supervisor, for his interest in the themes involved in this research, hours of reading my work and his very prompt replies. His wisdom and unstinting support enabled me to complete this work while holding down a full time job. Thanks go to Paul Gibbs for taking on the Middlesex University professional doctorate programme and assisting me in my endeavours. I would like to also thank my colleagues and the students I teach for their support, humour, kind words and for being a part of a school community that really cares for its inhabitants.

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Introduction

Williams et al (2012), in a report for The Ministry of Justice on prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds, state that:

‘...fifty-nine per cent of prisoners stated that they had regularly played truant from school, 63% had been suspended or temporarily excluded, and 42% stated that they had been permanently excluded or expelled. Prisoners with these issues were more likely to be reconvicted on release than those without’. (pii).

These figures linking permanent exclusion and criminality illustrate the need to look at ways to engage all school-age children and young adults in education and ensure wherever possible they complete the compulsory phase of education. The Department for Education (DFE, 2012b) states of permanent exclusion:

‘A school will usually only permanently exclude a child as a last resort, after trying to improve the child's behaviour through other means’.

This last resort for schools would then appear to inflict a large cost on those excluded. The links between crime, social isolation, reduced life chances and permanent exclusion have been well documented (Daniel al 2011 pp 137-168) which raises the question about how schools can best engage and keep the most vulnerable students who are at risk of permanent exclusion. There is no doubt that permanent exclusion figures nationally are a point of hot political debate. The literature covers the effects of permanent exclusion, how to avoid permanently excluding students and the reasons for permanent exclusions, but there is less about the experiences of the students with similar profiles to those who have not been permanently excluded and why they have managed to be successful in education. The importance of an investigation of these students can be justified by the gaining of a better understanding of how to include this vulnerable group in education; if students who have these ‘at risk’ profiles can succeed and a better understanding can be obtained as to why this is, this could develop the capacity of schools and associated services to avoid some

permanent exclusions and the subsequent damage that these cause. This study takes place on a single site, being a secondary comprehensive school in London. It will try to gain an understanding of how and why students who are at risk of permanent exclusion succeed.

A Personal Perspective

A key aspect of my learning over 20 years of teaching is that real success with students at risk of permanent exclusion comes from forming positive relationships with them. This may be a bold statement in times when various forms of assessment, pedagogy, curriculum design and accelerated teaching techniques are in vogue and are seen as the routes to outstanding lessons. Inasmuch as these are important components of success for students, the intangible issue of strong and purposeful working relationships between teacher and student, underpinned by mutual respect and shared visioning, cannot be overlooked. This opinion has emerged from my experience of teaching in a variety of educational settings, often with students who were at risk of permanent exclusion, had complex and life-long educational needs, were being educated in a youth offenders' institute or had been permanently excluded from school and were being taught in a special school setting. This in turn led to my current post as a senior leader in a London comprehensive school that has its share of at-risk students (47% of students being on free school meals, 11.2% on School Action of the Special Needs Register and 7.7% on School Action Plus or being Statemented; all figures higher than national averages (school Raise Online 2013, DFE 2014). From my experience and observations, the development of purposeful student-teacher relationships appeared, at first, to be a survival technique. That is, through engaging with some of the more challenging students through extracurricular work, conversations about issues they were interested in, and treating them with respect, I was able to achieve more in teaching and learning and avoid conflict with students. It soon became clear, however, that if I could do this effectively with the more challenging students, I could actually impact their lives positively.

Having taught a variety of students in various settings and been involved in the education of many students considered at risk of permanent exclusion (and some who, unfortunately, were excluded permanently), to use this acquired experience only as an introduction to any research - as suggested by some who promote the quantitative method - would appear very wasteful. It is not that my views and perceived learning over these years cannot be subject for debate - of course they can - it is that these views have validity and can be discussed and judged based on this.

During formal training in dealing with students deemed as having ESD (Emotional, Social and Behaviour Difficulties), I was regularly frustrated at the lack of time and discussion given to the need to develop student-teacher relationships and the benefit of having well-honed interpersonal skills. Training focused more on structures, computer software packages, behavioural policies, use of outside agencies and curriculum planning. One cannot deny the importance of these. However, they were dwarfed if good working relationships were not in place. All the other systemic/structural measures put forward to engage and educate those students most at risk are credible in their own right, but I believe are not enough. As an experienced teacher and now senior leader, I have watched teachers triumph in teaching so-called at-risk students, and succeeding due to mutual respect born of understanding, where the ethic of care (Collinson *et al.* 1999) in teaching becomes a practice and not simply an idealised notion.

These experiences of working with students at risk of permanent exclusion have enabled me to develop pedagogies that allow for trust to be developed. This trust then can be used to elicit the narratives of these students. As argued in the methodology section, the idea of an insider-researcher, where the researcher is a part of the culture he or she is describing or explaining, can be seen as important in obtaining valid and reliable data in this study. This kind of pedagogy is underpinned by a desire to engage and teach these students, to want to seek the best for all students and not just some. A study of the narratives of those students who can be seen as at risk, but have succeeded through education, could offer real insight into their experiences and, perhaps,

help broaden the debate about the types of pedagogies that can be used to reach and enable those students thought to be most at risk.

An overview of the study

This study is an important link in the chain of understanding the nature of exclusion. This, perhaps more importantly, suggests ways which may enable us as practitioners to help avoid these damaging permanent exclusions and adds to the knowledge used by policy makers in this particularly sensitive area. There are many models for school improvement (DFE National College for Teaching and Leadership 2013b and 2012e) and effective behaviour management strategies available for practitioners to use. These undoubtedly have a positive impact on maximising success for many students, some of whom have significant barriers to their learning including emotional, social and behavioural issues. However, there remains a group of students who do not survive in their first, or even subsequent mainstream school(s); it is these students who are of interest in this study. The stories of those students with similar life experiences (which often lead to emotional, social and behavioural issues), but who manage to survive mainstream education and succeed beyond that, may provide educators with more tools to help enable other students to survive and successfully avoid permanent exclusion.

This study will investigate the idea that inter-personal engagement with at-risk students, based on mutual respect and an ethic of care, is a factor in successfully educating students who are at risk of permanent exclusion. The study centres around eight students, all of whom attended the same comprehensive school in London and all of whom have profiles that place them in a category of being at risk of permanent exclusion. Despite these factors, all completed their schooling, obtained qualifications that reflected their base-line academic scores and managed a successful transition into post-16 education or training (or post- 17 for those affected by the rise in the participation age in education). These students are more than survivors of the educational system: they are successes.

This study investigated students whose data profile would have suggested that they should have been permanently excluded from school but have succeeded despite this. (How the data was collected, and the permissions required to use school data, can be found in the ethics section later.) Students were selected for this research based on their school records evidencing an at-risk profile, their completion of education up to the end of Year 11 and their academic performances. Success criteria were seen to be the obtaining of academic qualifications within the range of their predicted attainment by use of base-line data and a successful transition to further education or training post 16. There is a growing body of research around school exclusion: why it happens, the effects of it on both the student and wider society and its social and economic costs. This has impacted national policy, placing ever-changing expectations on schools and local authorities. A working definition of 'at risk' is taken from the literature, in particular the use of the Youth Justice Board of England and Wales 2005.

Students were interviewed at least twice individually, and again as a part of a focus group, to obtain their views on what enabled them to succeed. The interviews were semi-structured.

Research Context

This research project takes place in a London comprehensive co-educational school. It has 210 students per year group (Years 7 to 11) and a big 6th form of approximately 270 students, 120 of whom will be studying Level 3 or the final year of A level courses. The school produces many academically successful students, along with a proportion of students who struggle through their school lives and a few who become permanently excluded. The proportion of students on free school meals is nearly two times the national average. There are two resourced provisions on site that are run by the school. The school educates 42 students who have a Statement of Educational Needs and has recorded 19% of the student cohort as having a special educational need. Some of our students overcome significant barriers to their learning, mainly social and personal, to achieve; some do not manage to do this.

At this school, on average three students a year (0.25%) are permanently excluded for behaviours that are deemed to be so extreme that they compromised the health and safety of other students and/or staff. In the year 2009 to 2010 there were 2740 permanent exclusions from all schools in England and Wales (Direct.gov.uk July 2011). National permanent exclusions in secondary schools over this year were at 0.14% of the school population. The school takes on 30% of students from a local estate which is the most deprived area in the Local Authority (Local authority web site 2011.) The vulnerable students who remain in education at the school do well according to the academic data, often meeting or exceeding their subject-specific attainment targets. All move on to further education and some to higher education. In the year 2010/2011, there were 11 students identified through in-house screening as being at real risk of permanent exclusion during Year 11. There were varied outcomes for these 11 students: three stayed on into the 6th form at the school and obtained qualifications enabling them to access further study or training post-18; one left to train as an airline cabin steward; one completed an apprenticeship; three left to study at an FE college locally; one left to join another 6th form and gained A levels; one has subsequently had a baby and is a young mother; and one extremely vulnerable female left school in year 14 with a Level 3 performing arts qualification and managed to obtain a place on a dance foundation degree. At the beginning of this study, out of the Year 11 cohort 2011/2012, only one student who left school was Not in Education, Training or Employment (NEET) and she is the young mother previously mentioned. In the 6th form only two students were registered as NEET on leaving the school: this gives a NEET figure of 0.6% for all the school leavers between the years 2010 to 2012. In November 2011, 11.5% of 18 to 24 year olds in London were claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), the national figure for the same time is 15.7% (Nomis December 2011) while nationally NEET figures run at 18.6% for the same age range (BBC News 2011). The DFE (2012c) has also identified students who have been permanently excluded as having reduced life chances, reinforcing the importance of ensuring that students complete the compulsory phase of education as a minimum.

Chapter 1. Literature on Behaviour, Discipline and Exclusion

Introduction

This chapter looks at the literature on at-risk students and students who have been permanently excluded, and what evidence there is for a link between their success or failure at secondary school and their emotional engagement with members of its community. The idea to be explored is then that this engagement in school and with the school community can have a protective effect from permanent exclusion. Protective factors are seen by Rutter (1987) as mechanisms that add together to counter at-risk factors or provide resilience against at-risk factors.

Perhaps Parsons (2011) can go some way to answering why this is a topic worthy of research:

‘Disruption and indiscipline in schools needs to be addressed. But both the disproportionality of exclusions for some groups, notably the poor and those already marginalised, and the negative consequences lifelong for those who experience exclusion, plus the harm and cost falling on the wider society strongly suggest that better ways than excluding need to be found. Social cohesion is not helped by the present exclusionary and punitive approach’. (P4)

Although the proposed research will not look specifically at the ‘cost’ of permanent exclusion, this ‘cost’ does provide a compelling argument for attempting to discover how we can better support and nurture students at risk of permanent exclusion in our mainstream education system. A part of this process is a better understanding of the experiences of students at risk of permanent exclusion (referred to as ‘at risk’) who succeed in the English education system.

Who is ‘At Risk’?

The most recent guidance on risk factors associated with school exclusion, youth offending and drug misuse comes from The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2005). It produced a list of risk

factors for offending, drug misuse and school exclusion based on the data available. These factors are then used to target and work with the most at-risk in terms of youth offending. The Youth Justice Board provide the following risk factors for school exclusion (the top six most important when factors are rank-ordered).

1. Being male;
2. Being non-white;
3. Having fewer rooms in the household;
4. Moving house many times;
5. Being older;
6. Having no car in the household.

It is important to note here that being non-white is a rather crude category. Asian students are excluded from school at lower rates than black African or Caribbean students and only slightly above white students (DFE 2012c profile of exclusions in England). Fewer rooms in the household and having no car in the household could indicate deprivation. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2005) outlined the risk factors for youth offending and substance abuse and linked these also to school exclusion, stating that these: 'significantly increase the odds of being excluded ' (from school) P7.

Family, school, community and personal factors are also seen as being considerations when identifying at-risk youths (see appendix 1).

It also states that:

'Risk factors cluster together in the lives of the most disadvantaged children; the chances those children will become anti-social and criminally active increases in line with the number of risk factors' (P2).

A study of fixed-term and permanent exclusion figures (DFE 2013d) indicates the groups of students more likely to be excluded from school and the behaviours most likely to lead to exclusion. During

the academic year 2011 to 2012, data analysis shows the groups of students at increased risk of permanent exclusion: those with an Special Educational Need who do not have a Statement of Educational Needs are 11 times more likely to be permanently excluded than other students; boys were over three times more likely than girls; students with a Statement of Educational Needs eight times more likely than those without; students on free school meals four times more likely than those not in receipt of free school meals; students who are Caribbean or mixed race white/Caribbean are three times more likely other students, students who are looked after by local authorities are twice as likely, with permanent exclusions peaking at the ages of 13 to 14 at 0.44% of the whole school population. In the academic year 2011 to 2012, 2690 permanent exclusions out of a total of 5170 occurred in this age range (just over 50% of the total permanent exclusions). National permanent exclusions data highlights the following behaviours as being more likely to lead to a permanent exclusion: (in rank order) continued disruptive behaviour; physical assault against a pupil; other; physical assault against an adult (very high in the primary sector); and drug- and alcohol-related (very small in the primary sector but rising to this rank-ordered position in the secondary sector where the research project resides).

The summer riots of 2011 in London highlighted the links between youth offending, school exclusion and these risk factors: 67% of those arrested had a Special Educational Need, 46% were black, 42% were in receipt of free school meals, 33% had been excluded from school over the academic year 2010-2011 and 10% had been permanently excluded from school (Taylor 2011; BBC News 2011). This is an illustration of the possible social impact and cost of school exclusion.

Success in Education

The DFE (2012a) defines academic success as achieving three National Curriculum (NC) levels of progress across Key Stages Three and Four (KS3 and KS4 being school Years 7 to 11, students aged 11 to 16). This would be defined as 'expected progress' for any student. To select the research group, this will then be coupled with these students avoiding permanent exclusion from school, and

choosing and engaging in work, education or training that matches their level of qualifications post-16. This matching of qualifications will involve ensuring that the students transfer onto an ability-appropriate post-16 option. For example, a student gaining A to C grades at GCSE would transfer to a Level 3 course (AS and A2 levels or a level 3 Btec/NVQ) , gaining Ds to Es at GCSE would allow access to Level 2 courses (GCSE resits or Btec/NVQ) and below Es a Level 1 course (Btec/NVQ). Using this DFE measure of 'expected progress' across KS2 to 4 is challenging for six of the eight students involved in the research as they received free school meals throughout their KS3 and 4 schooling. In the academic year 2012-13, the attainment gap at GCSE level (age 16) between students not receiving free school meals and those who did was clear: 26.5% fewer students receiving free school meals attained a C grade or better for English and Maths (DFE 2014), compared with those who did not. For the target school, this attainment gap in the same time period was 11%: the target school effectively narrowed this gap for free school meal students. Although this is not progress data, as the expected measure above relates to, it illustrates the lower academic performance of this group. The free school meal measure in this context can be seen as a proxy for poverty. The remaining two students who did not receive free school meals could be seen to have measures of relative poverty as seen in their profiles (refer to 'Karl' and 'Joe' in the research section of this paper).

To better understand the current national situation regarding exclusions, it is important to understand the historical context. The history of education in the United Kingdom can be seen largely as one of increasing participation and 'inclusion' in formal, school-based education. Since the 1870 Education Act, which set up compulsory education during the early years for the masses, subsequent acts widened this net, provided for food, medical inspection, and raised the school leaving age (notably the Education Acts of 1802, 1880, 1906, 1907 1944 and 1948). The recognition of Special Educational Needs was seen in 1944 as a medical issue (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2006). Warnock in 1978 really first introduced the idea of Special Educational Needs and 'integrative education'. The 1981 Education Act introduced the Warnock Framework and production of the SEN Code of Practice and enshrinement in law of provision for students with more

complex and 'lifelong' SENs followed (those receiving a statement of Special Educational Needs), further promoting this inclusive model. The 1980s and 1990s saw a drop in the number of students in special education and a rise of students with a recognised SEN in mainstream schools, thus illustrating greater recognition of SEN in education. The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2006) stated that this increase in the recognition and prevalence of students with a SEN in mainstream schools led to a mismatch between what was happening in schools and the framework (created by Warnock) within which they were working; in turn, this led to high levels of frustration from parents, students, teachers and local authorities. The Tomlinson Report in 2004 looked to include more students in the qualifications system through changes to the formal qualifications offered by schools and colleges. There was a tension here, however, as dealing with disruptive students in the classroom became a political issue (Gove 2011; BBC News 2005), as early as 1999, Reid (1999) had identified the political nature of exclusion led by national Government. The then Labour Government produced a truancy and exclusions report that further fine-tuned exclusions data and, for the first time, set targets for the reduction of exclusions (Reid 1999). On the one hand, education was becoming more inclusive through parliamentary acts passed and reports commissioned by Government; on the other, poor classroom behaviour was seen as a political vote-winner and schools were being given the message of no tolerance of poor behaviour leading to disruption (Gove 2011, BBC News 2005), seemingly encouraging exclusions from school. Before the 1990s there was little advice on school exclusions (Blythe and Milner 1996). The introduction of league tables in 1988 saw permanent exclusion figures soar (Parsons 1999). At this time there were reports of students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and SEN students being permanently excluded, often to 'get them specialist help' (Booth 1996). 1990 saw the introduction of the National Exclusions Recording System (NERS) to track exclusions nationally and more advice/rules on exclusions were developed by the then-DFES; these were revised in 1993. This laid the foundation for the current tension between the inclusion of students in education and excluding those whose behaviour was deemed as unmanageable. It appeared then that Government policy

was impacting on inclusion where disruptive or 'difficult' students were concerned, creating a barrier to inclusion for these students.

The exclusion Pandora's Box was now open. Before this time, individual schools decided on exclusions based on their own rules. If a child were excluded they may go to another school (including a special school) if the parents desired this or they could, and did, disappear from education, being kept at home or, in some cases, go out to work even into the late 1990s (Kilpatrick 1997). NERS provided the information to regulate exclusions, data was collected and students tracked, schools could now be held to account. The idea of 'Inclusion' became more important following The Warnock Report (1978), the duty on local authorities to assess and identify students with an SEN, the 1993 and 1996 Education Acts and the publishing of the Code of Practice for SEN (1994, revised in 2001). SEN students, including those with ESB, now had the right to be educated in mainstream schools but only where it would be compatible with efficient education and the efficient use of resources (Douglas Silas Solicitors 2012). The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act of 2001 (SENDA), leading to the revised Code of Conduct (2002), changed this wording to state that students must be educated in a mainstream school unless it is incompatible with efficient education and the wishes of the parent (Douglas Silas Solicitors 2012). The pressure was on to keep SEN students in mainstream schooling. The Education Act of 2002 paradoxically also allowed schools the right to exclude students for fixed terms or permanently, enabling schools to exclude some SEN students. The history of education in England has been one of inclusion: from the privileged few, to the privileged few plus those seen in need of charity; to the inclusion of trade-based schools and vocational education; to education for all (initially in the early years, then to 14, 16, 17 in 2013 and onto 18 years of age in 2015). The 1990s saw the rise of the debate regarding the inclusion of students with an SEN. This led to a debate around the exclusion of SEN as the implications of this policy became clear (in particular, students with ESB). Again there was a tension between inclusion and exclusion, this though included some of the most vulnerable in society. The right to receive an education is a human right as outlined by the Human Rights Act of 1998, adopted by the UK

Government (Human Rights Act 1998), so exclusion from education is therefore a breach of human rights. An answer to this next apparent paradox is that provision is made for excluded students by local authorities in providing places for them in other schools, Pupil Referral Units (a sort of holding ground while attempts are made to find alternative schooling), using tutors to home-school or by using existing special school provision if the student has a statement of SEN. Although not all permanently excluded students remain in education.

Data on students not in education during the compulsory phase can be extrapolated from the information provided by the DFE (2012c and 2012f). Using post-16 data can give an indication of the scale of the issue in young people remaining in education or using their education gained up to the age of 16 (for this data); Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) figures demonstrate that there remains a surprisingly large amount of students not accessing employment, training or education (for 16-24 year olds, 15.9% of the population at over 950,000). Reported school absence figures can help gain an understanding of how many students are not in education during the compulsory phase. In 2009, 2% of all secondary school absence was recorded as 'Excluded, No Alternative Provision' (DFE 2012c), amounting to 0.12% of the secondary school population, about 6,900 students. Based on this data, that is then nearly 7000 students in England and Wales at any given time who are not receiving an education due to school exclusions. Ogg and Kail (2010) claim that this figure is actually closer to 10,000 school age children. OFSTED (2013) stated in its 2013 report into children missing out on an education that 1400 students in 15 Local Authorities in England were not receiving a full-time education (this was a pilot study across these authorities). If this figure is representative across all other local authorities then a figure of around 10,000 students would be not in full-time education across England, supporting Ogg and Kail's assertion. The Human Rights Act 1998 outlines the right to education and for children the right not to be discriminated against (Directgov 2012), giving all students, it would seem, the right to be educated along with their peers in mainstream schools. Parents can opt out of special schooling and into a mainstream school for their children if they have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. However, schools have the

right to accept students only 'as long as this is compatible with provision of efficient instruction and avoidance of reasonable public expenditure' (Education Act 1996 Legislation.gov.uk 'The National Archives'). This clause then allows for exclusions from school if it can be proved that that it is too expensive or too disruptive to other students if they remain in the school setting. Not all students receive an education, certainly not one in a mainstream setting.

The apparent lack of reliable data on students not in education, being in effect a breach of human rights (that is those students not in any form of education) is worrying, but perhaps reflects the current tension between inclusion and exclusion in education. OFSTED (2013) suggests that schools and local authorities need to provide a better service for students with behavioural difficulties to prevent exclusion from education. This follows their study on students missing out on an education, which concluded that many students with behavioural difficulties when not in school suffered low expectations and a poor educational service. This study also uncovered a practice used by schools to exclude where pupils do not go through a formal exclusions process and are thus not included in exclusion data and identified to the relevant support services; excluding in this manner would be illegal. These students are seen to be more at risk of educational failure and possible harm, due to them not receiving any support following a refusal by the school in question to allow them to attend.

The practical issues of full inclusion (Bailey 2003; Booth 2000; DCSF 2000) appear to have led the philosophical debate regarding how to manage inclusive education in England and Wales. Should it be with a set of different schools devoted to teaching students with an SEN only? Should mainstream schools have resourced provisions to take SEN students and provide support using experts in that SEN? Should mainstream schools open their doors to all students, regardless of SENs, or should there be a combination of these possibilities? What do we do to effectively educate those who are permanently excluded from school? There is an argument that, if the answer to exclusion is inclusion, then there is a need to look at how to avoid excluding in the first place. This is where this study aims to inform.

Students who are permanently excluded and who are educated in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) or in a special school benefit from small class sizes where positive student/teacher relationships can develop (Ogg & Kaill 2010), albeit, arguably, among a student cohort less able to engage effectively with each other. In the context of this research, inclusion happens before exclusion because at-risk students are in mainstream education. For students who begin their education in a mainstream setting and are at risk of becoming permanently excluded, an understanding of how they could achieve and avoid permanent exclusion from school is vital in considering how schools can help prevent exclusions. These students can be identified using existing data (The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales 2005; Reid 1999; DFE 2013d) and school staff can therefore begin to work with them inside the school setting to prevent permanent exclusion. As long there is institutional commitment to include at-risk students, the type of work we do to provide protection from permanent exclusion comes to the foreground.

Inter-personal engagement of at-risk students

This greater interest in school exclusions and what happened to excluded children in the UK coincided with work in the USA by Hawkins and Catalano (1992) on 'Communities that Care'. This initiative investigated the causes of behaviours that placed students in the at-risk category for school age children, including truancy and exclusion. It looked to a coalition-based programme of family, community and school engagement around the child to prevent these at-risk behaviours such as delinquency, drug-taking and dropping out of school. This work outlined the factors that indicated a child being at risk of these behaviours (Weare 2004; Battistich 2010).

Research in the USA on factors that provide 'protection' from at-risk behaviours is used by Catalano and Hawkins in 1992 to develop their 'Communities that Care' model for protecting adolescents from drug abuse; this initiative was supported by The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the US (Catalano and Hawkins 2005). This research-based model was then expanded to include other at-risk behaviours, along with school drop-out and exclusion. This led to other,

similar programmes being developed to further work with adolescents seen as at risk (Creating a Caring Community, Solomon et al 1996; The Child Development Project which then became Caring School Communities, Battistich 2010; The Miami Positive Youth Development Project, Kurtines et al 2008). These programmes looked towards educational and psychological research to develop programmes that aimed to 'bond' students to institutions (educational, religious, family), taking a whole community stakeholder approach. Catelano and Hawkins (2005) see this bonding as being the development of strong and healthy relationships, through all aspects of the community, with adults who hold healthy beliefs and have clear standards. The counter view then is that at-risk factors cause a lack of bonding to the community; instead, they create bonds with peers and adults with negative attitudes, such as those promoted through gang culture, school refusing and drug abuse. These programmes have shown success with some very vulnerable students. Battistich (2010) claims that the positive effects on attachment to the institution and agreeing norms seem to have a lasting effect, mirrored by the fact that programmes such as these have been in evidence in the USA for over 30 years now (Kurtines et al 2008). Gorard and Huat See (2013) state that a review of research into the impact of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes in the US suggests that such programmes are generally effective and can improve school engagement, classroom behaviour and academic performance. They state that there is evidence of an average of an 11 point score improvement in standardised tests for students involved in SEL programmes, along with evidence that this improvement continues over time.

Hawkins and Catelano's work precedes the work performed by the UK's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU). In 1998 the SEU looked to unemployment, poor housing and living in a high crime area as risk factors as predictors of social exclusion. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2005) document regarding at-risk factors for youth offending, substance abuse, truancy and school exclusions also cites work from the USA on this topic and suggests that there is an over-lap of the risk factors seen as predicting school exclusion, criminal behaviour and substance abuse.

Three areas of research can be seen to be pertinent in the study and discussion of school exclusions: 'at-risk' (already mentioned), 'social exclusion' (based on a set of 50 indicators covering a wide range of issues, ranging from low income, worklessness and debt, to ill-health, poor education and problems in communities, Adridge et al 2011) and 'succeeding against the odds' (achieving success while overcoming a variety of mainly social barriers). A study of these areas has identified what are seen as the pertinent issues for students and young people. There is little work on the narratives of those students who have succeeded 'against the odds'. However what emerges as a theme in this area of study is the inter-personal nature of the school experiences of both those students who do get permanently excluded and those who succeed. Smyth and Wrigley (2013) claim that:

'Some of the most interesting insights into young people's experiences of schooling concern the pedagogical interactions with their teachers. The term *pedagogical* refers not only to teaching methods but also the entirety of what young people learn from adults...' (p7)

For them, the experience of schooling has elements of social learning and emotional engagement.

Cooper et al (2000), from their work using case studies of students, state:

'... the concept of personal experience, which emerged as a significant feature of all the case studies plays a central part in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion'. (p185)

John (1996) looked at excluded students' perceptions of their schooling and identified the themes related to their school experiences and leading up to permanent exclusion about which they talked: respect, fairness, trust, humiliation, physical contact, racism and gender. These students discussed the need to improve teacher/student relationships. Gorard and Huat See (2013) undertook a review of research into overcoming disadvantage in education; about school attainment for individual students they state that:

“...the noticeably strong association is not what kind of students an individual attends school with, but what happens in interactions with teachers and others when at school.....Students’ reported experiences of school are related to their perception of trust, respect and fairness at the hands of their teachers and other adults in education”. (p89)

Gorard and Huat See (2013) also state:

“Perhaps quality of interaction is part of the explanation for any differences in outcomes...and of the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged”. (p35)

Gorard and Huat See (2013) explain that a meta-analysis of over 100 studies found that student-teacher relationships were the most important factor in classroom management and students’ engagement in learning. They collate research around student aspirations, trust, being prepared for the world of work along with other ‘wider outcomes’ for students and state:

“For these kinds of wider outcomes, the noticeably strong association is not what kind of students an individual attends with, but what happens in interactions with teachers and others when at school”. (p89)

They also found that students’ reported experiences of school are related to their perceptions of trust, respect and fairness at the hands of teachers and other adults in education. This work is supported by the SEL programmes’ assertions of ‘bonding’ being the formation of relationships with adults who have positive attitudes.

John (1996), Cooper et al (2000) and Smyth and Wrigley (2013) all suggest that the inter-personal nature of the school experience is a significant factor in school-based success. This is further explained by Smythe and Wrigley (2013) when they suggest that:

“...learning depends on students believing that teachers really care about them, their lives, their families. Only then are students prepared to make the social, emotional and psychic investment necessary for learning”. (p170)

Reid (1999) worked with truants in South Wales and developed a list of at-risk factors for school truancy (refer to Appendix 2). There is some overlap between Reid’s list and those from the ‘at-risk’ factors suggested by the England and Wales Youth Justice Board (2005). There are also references to poor parent/child relationships and young people having difficulty forming relationships with peers. These ‘relationship’ issues are picked up by the young people themselves as Reid interviews them. All students cited in the research talked about their in-school relationships, not being helped or treated like a ‘real person’, not getting on with teachers and not getting on with peers. Reid also outlines the links between low ability, poor in-school behaviour, anti-social behaviour, low self-concept, low socio-economic status and truancy. Again, overlap with issues of other ‘at-risk’ behaviours. It seems clear that since exclusion guidance in the early 1990s, some students have been saved from permanent exclusion by their truancy. It is not possible to exclude a student from a state school for truancy; the emphasis is on getting them to attend (DFE Exclusion Guidance 2011).

However, Reid’s answers to preventing and managing truancy look heavily at school structures and policies. He suggests clear rules, early identification of behaviour problems, specialist help, good information sharing between professional bodies, early involvement of parents and a more flexible and creative approach to the school curriculum. There is little mention of the need to improve the nature of the relationships that these students experience through their schooling, a link clearly borne out through the work of Hawkins and Catalano. John (1996) falls somewhere between the structures and inter-personal approaches to avoiding exclusions and states that it is whether the school has a child-centred approach and its values, structures and systems that can help avoid permanent exclusions. The Youth Justice Board of England and Wales (2005) puts more importance on the area of relationships and states: ‘Children and young people can be influenced by the

prevalent behaviour, norms and values held by those to whom they feel attached. Thus parents, teachers and community leaders who lead by example and hold clearly stated expectations regarding young people's behaviour are helping to protect them against risk'. (P4)

This point may seem obvious to professionals working with young people or in a school setting, but much of the literature around responses to permanent exclusion and guarding against other at-risk behaviours looks to policy, lesson delivery and structure as the answers. This is even if there is recognition that at-risk students need engagement on an inter-personal level to succeed (Fogell and Long 1997; Weare 2004; Cooper et al 2000; Parsons 2011; Reid 1999).

The Labour Government of 1997 to 2010 produced a series of 'National Strategies' to be rolled out in mainstream schools, aimed at improving the quality of education for all and promoting inclusion.

One of these was the 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' (SEAL), introduced as a pilot in 2005 (DFE 2010). Here, specific, taught work on what emotions are, how to deal with them, problem solving for difficult social situations and the teaching of appropriate responses to these situations was outlined, and lessons were prepared for schools to use. This student-centred strategy, based on a rights and responsibilities approach to social and emotional engagement in the school setting was evidence-based (DFE 2010), and developed from the work in the USA and subsequent research in the UK (Youth Justice Board of England and Wales 2005). This approach to fostering more emotional engagement in learning largely missed out the important area of staff-student relationships and the importance of how members of staff deal on an inter-personal level with students. This area is seen as important by Cooper et al 2000; John 1996; De Pear and Garner 1996; Weare 2004; Battistich 2010; Wentzel 2010; McGrath 2007; Smith and Pellegrini 2000; Ainscow et al 1998; Smythe and Wringley 2013; Gorard and Huat See 2013. The literature around students who have been excluded or are near exclusion shows that when these students are asked about their school experiences, they will talk about friendships, relationships with peers and teaching staff (Ainscow et al 1998; Cooper et al 2000; John 1996; Weare 2004; Martin and Calabrese R 2011; Maddern 2012). Munns et

al (2006) state that high emotional engagement can help keep at-risk students in school. The Department for Education, Tasmania (2002) claims that helping boys engage includes developing good relationships between staff and students, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) state that the forming of positive student/staff relationships are a factor in high performing schools. But what then are these inter-personal factors and what is it that the literature claims are the areas that require development?

The Youth Justice Board of England and Wales (2005) cites the protective factors that can moderate the effects of exposure to risk of school exclusion: female gender; resilient temperament; sense of self-efficacy; positive outgoing disposition; high intelligence; stable warm and affectionate relationship with one or both parents; links with teachers or other adults and peers who hold positive attitudes and 'model' positive social behaviour; prevailing healthy attitudes across a community; views of parents; promotion of healthy standards within school; opportunities for involvement; social and reasoning skills; recognition and due praise. One of the stated categories in this document is 'Social Bonding', which will be picked up later in this paper. As previously discussed, deprivation is an risk factor and so the inclusion of affluence as a protective factor is appropriate. The factors outlined in this category talk of positive parent and teacher relationships, and social and reasoning skills helping to off-set other risk factors. Hay McBer in 2000 undertook a research project for the then-Labour Government entitled 'Research into Teacher Effectiveness: A Model of Teacher Effectiveness'. This work included a look at what a group of Year 8 students felt made a good teacher. These were a teacher who is: kind; generous; listens to you; encourages you; has faith in you; keeps confidences; likes teaching children; takes time to explain things; helps you when you are stuck; tells you how you are doing; allows you to have your say; doesn't give up on you; cares for your opinion; makes you feel clever; treats people equally; stands up for you; makes allowances; tells the truth; and is forgiving. These answers may be unsurprising coming from 12 and 13 year olds but they were certainly different from more traditional views of teacher effectiveness and how students learn. The interpersonal nature of many of these has little to do with this traditional

‘delivery’ approach and pedagogical guidance that forms what schools do and that teachers continue to receive through in-service training. Are we then missing a real opportunity to work on areas that would improve our delivery to and results from our students? The answer is perhaps, but also that good teachers do this already. The use of developing positive relationships with students would appear more intuitive than explicitly taught. The SEAL programme was the first nationwide, Government-sponsored approach to attempt to teach those aspects of emotions and interpersonal/social skills that can be seen to directly affect attendance, behaviour and performance (a triad of need when looking at educational attainment). The DFE site, under the heading ‘The Importance of SEAL for Adults’, (DFE 2010) states:

- evidence from the US shows that programmes which include staff development and education are more likely to have an impact on pupil behaviour than those that do not;
- social and emotional skills are as central to the performance and emotional well-being of staff as they are to the learning and well-being of young people;
- teaching is fundamentally a social activity – staff need high levels of social and emotional skills to do their job effectively, and having higher levels makes the job more enjoyable and manageable. These skills contribute to staff well-being, and thus to staff retention; they help to lower levels of stress, and reduce time off work and premature retirement.

The current Government seem less keen on using SEAL in schools and has abandoned it as a national strategy. This may sound the death knell for the programme and with it the only nationally recognised programme for the explicit teaching of these socially and educationally important skills. This may then make future work on evidencing the impact of positive student/staff relationships more important in potentially altering practice. The Hay McBer report findings from 12 and 13 year

old students is supported by work conducted by researchers such as Weare (2004) and Martin and Calabrese (2012) discussed previously.

Other research, including that from the UK, would reflect the idea that underpins the US intervention models: the development of positive relationships in schools and creation of bonds between the school and the student can provide protection from at risk-behaviours. Maddern (2012) identified 'respect' as a key issue for excluded students, while De Pear and Garner (1996) stated that those at risk need to have their voices heard in decision making in school. Additionally, Weare (2004) stated that students need to be attached to school if they are to behave well and learn effectively; she also claims that hearing students' voices, communicating effectively with them, developing positive relationships and using these to improve self-esteem are important in ensuring that students can engage fully in school. Wentzel (2010) looked to teacher/student relationships as being important for good academic and social outcomes and in valuing the norms of the institution. McGrath (2007) also claimed that positive relationships in school produce improved educational outcomes, along with behaviour, and that student/teacher relationships are important for positive progress. Cooper et al (2000) stressed the importance of personal experience in education and the need to have an awareness of the 'structures of feeling' calling them a 'crucial dimension' in inclusion. Ainscow et al (1998) interviewed students close to exclusion and noted that they all talked of their relationships in school, opportunities for friendship and they spoke of the manner in which lessons were conducted and not their style or content.

All of this research and comment on the need to engage students on an emotional and inter-personal level appears to bear out the experiences of excluded or close to excluded students and can give us pointers as to what then helps prevent exclusions. There still remains a group of students who have many of the previously outlined risk factors but remain in, and succeed in, secondary mainstream education, and move on to appropriate pathways post-16. There remains a lack of research in this area, research that could help formulate approaches to engage others with similar

at-risk profiles. Recent work on succeeding against the odds and social mobility (where receiving free school meals and a working class socio-economic status are the at-risk factors) may also provide evidence as to what may be a factor in overcoming these risk factors and succeeding in education.

Siraj and Blatchford (2010) used narrative-based research to identify what is successful in assisting students in succeeding against the odds in education. They suggest that self-regulation is a good predictor of resilience to disadvantage. Self-regulation is in turn predicted by the ability to be independent and concentrate. They also suggest that ‘concerted cultivation’ of students in developing these skills ‘pays off’ (p474) - that is, working with students on developing their educational and extra-curricular experiences and instilling positive attitudes towards education strategies for independence and aspirations. In her research on resilience, Chapman, in a personal email regarding her research into succeeding against the odds at university (2012), stated that:

‘...resilient learners have a noticeable ability to exist in the space that lies between full inclusion and exclusion. In fact they almost relish it. The cohort you are dealing with [the proposed research subjects] wouldn't seem to have that ability at the moment, so the challenge is how to provide them with the skills that will enable them to survive 'outsiderliness' while staying inside the system enough to benefit from the security it offers’ (Chapman email 2012).

This research was carried out on university students who had already succeeded in education at their secondary school or post-secondary school. However it raises the question of whether this is the state that students who succeed ‘against the odds’ and avoid permanent exclusion experience through their secondary education or if this is a coping mechanism developed through a successful secondary phase? It may be important to discover how much of this ability to enter and achieve in Higher Education is affected by their inter-personal experiences and ability to ‘bond’ with school and its community, if at all.

The need for a supportive home background is stated by Siraj and Blatchford (2010). This is echoed by the OEDC (2011) in its research on succeeding against the odds using Science progress on a structured test (PISA) with secondary age students. The OEDC also alluded to targeted approaches to foster positive approaches to student confidence and resilience. This raises this issue of whether specific targeting of at-risk students with interventions around confidence and resilience could provide protection from exclusion from school. It may be that upwards social mobility could be a protective factor against exclusion. Indicators of poverty, as discussed, are risk factors, so moving out of poverty may then also provide protection from exclusion. Cremer et al (2010), Themelis (2008) and Ianelli and Patterson (2007) in their studies of social mobility all claim that education alone is not enough to promote social mobility; the rules and networks learned and gained through belonging to the middle or upper classes, and the privileges that are conferred in these domains by private education, create further barriers to 'upward' social mobility. During the Westminster Forum on Education and Social Mobility (2012), Alan Milburn MP (Independent reviewer on the government social mobility strategy) stated that the advice he would be giving to Government would be to make the availability and quality of extra-curricular work in schools a part of the OFSTED inspection and the need to develop access to experiences and engagement in the professions a requirement for all students. Developing these 'networks', access to better quality extra-curricular activities and a better understanding of the 'rules' of the middle and upper classes could be gained by access to the institutions that these classes frequent. Education would be a necessary component in gaining access to university where this understanding of the rules and networks could be developed. This starts with education. However Siraj and Blatchford (2010) also stated that there is a desire from lower socio-economic groups to get actively involved in education and provide extra support for their children, and that if families believe that their efforts will be rewarded, they put in the effort to support their children. Smythe and Wrigley (2013) pointed to social inequalities as being mirrored in the school system in the UK, and that schools cannot on their own address wider issues of social justice. They call for more resources, and a change in attitude towards schools in

areas of social deprivation where low academic attainment and high social exclusion are evident. It would seem obvious that schools only have a part to play in inclusion. At-risk students bring with them into schools exclusionary factors and, as previously discussed, the more exclusionary or 'at-risk' factors they bring, the greater the chance of them being permanently excluded from school. It is important for schools to recognise and acknowledge these factors in an attempt to identify students early and work with them; it is also important to realise that schools have a part to play in inclusion in its wider sense and in working to prevent permanent exclusion from school.

The literature points to the following issues for full inclusion in education and success in school:

- There are many risk factors for exclusion from school: the more a child has, the more at-risk they are. These risk factors include being children from lower socio-economic groups and having poor peer and teacher relationships.
- The development of a bond between educational institutions and students (including community and school bonding, and community involvement) and improved inter-personal relationships can help prevent exclusion from school and promote success. Excluded students and those close to exclusion point to in-school relationships as being important.
- School exclusion is a political issue. Whole school, Local Authority and national initiatives and policy can have an impact on school exclusion/inclusion.
- Schools can have an impact on exclusions but they have to work inside a social setting where social exclusion can be seen to dictate school exclusion.
- Social mobility can be seen as a protective factor against school exclusion.
- For students to succeed against the odds they require better in-school and extra-curricular experiences, self-regulation, resilience and concerted cultivation.

The view that the quality of inter-personal relationships and the 'bonding' that a student can develop with the institution and its members is a determinant of their ability to succeed in school (in

particular is would seem with students in the 'at-risk' category) has led some researchers and commentators to look to what schools can do to support this. Cooper et al (2000) claimed that:

'...the process of inclusion is of paramount concern, because it represents both a positive response to exclusion, as well as a framework for embracing the needs and interests of all students' (p10).

They go on to say:

'What makes a difference? *Everything* makes a difference. Every act of meaning making, as students and staff process their school experience, contributes in some way to how they respond to that experience... The impact of the school experience on the self is daily manifested in the classrooms, corridors, playgrounds and staff rooms' (P 186).

So then what could this 'framework' look like? Cooper et al (2000) suggest the following as guidance in developing the inclusive school:

'When schools and classrooms are most effectively working towards inclusion, teachers' and students' personal experience includes

- A sense of being valued as a person.
- A sense of belonging and involvement.
- A sense of personal satisfaction and achievement.
- A sense of being accepted and listened to.
- A sense of congruence between personal and institutional values.
- A sense of the personal meaningfulness of the tasks of teaching and learning.
- A sense of efficacy, of power to influence things for the better.

An awareness of these structures of feeling, we have argued, is a crucial dimension in the dynamic of inclusion' (P193).

These views are partially supported by Armstrong, Belmont and Verillon (2000) who state:

‘So the notion of inclusion (integration) concerns the recognition of the right of all individuals to full participation in social life as full and participating actors.’ (P62).

This appears to call for a SEAL-type approach to all interactions in school, not just student-to-student and student-to-school staff which is taught through the SEAL programme and work reflected in the US programmes from earlier in this chapter. The role of teachers here then is vital in providing the environment within which students’ work engages them, and provides them with a sense of worth, power and being valued. The suggestion here is then that teachers need to not only plan how they are going to teach a topic but also to set up the class to provide opportunities for students to gain access to these inclusionary experiences. They must also consider how they will engage with the students in their classes. Cooper et al (2000) suggest that:

‘The truly inclusive school, where exclusion has become a redundant option, is not to be achieved by perfecting the specification of a vision, but by a particular kind of work - the construction of personal meaning, the making of human sense - the work that is undertaken by teachers and students together. (P195)

This suggests a change in the approaches schools traditionally have towards their pastoral and discipline issues, towards the more democratic model as suggested in the US programmes outlined earlier in this chapter (Creating a Caring Community, Solomon et al 1996; The Child Development Project which then became Caring School Communities, Battistich 2010; The Miami Positive Youth Development Project, Kurtines et al 2008) or, at least, a model of school policy and practice that has as one of its aims the emotional/interpersonal engagement of students, and that makes a concerted effort to bond students (in particular the most at-risk) to the institution and those who work in it. An important aspect of future research therefore could be the effects of this approach on students who are not at risk as they would also be a part of this educational system. It can be seen that schools

change largely because they have to. Poor behaviour leads to innovative behaviour management, poor attainment leads to innovative pedagogy. Resources are placed where they are needed to get a school to develop its practice in perceived areas of weakness. This then may lead to schools that tend to 'coast' if there is no perceived need to change practice. So, if there is not a perceived issue with student attachment and engagement (that is, there are few or no students at-risk), little is likely to change in the school. This may well lead to a few being excluded from the educational process or permanently excluded from school. As with many remediation packages for other Special Educational Needs, it can be seen that the pedagogy required for the educational progress of SEN students (such as think time, a greater visual component, forewarning of events, a settled and known environment with good learning routines) is actually good for all students in the class (Ideus and Cooper 1996; Miles and Miles 1997; Thompson 2003). Therefore it could be argued that approaches developed to further the inclusion of at-risk students could also be seen to be beneficial for all. Certainly, the development of better in-school relationships and an improved inter-personal experience could only be seen as a positive development in schools. This idea that what is good for vulnerable students can have a positive impact on all in the classroom is important if practice is to change. Inclusion of this nature can then be seen to be good for all and therefore supports the imperative to implement inclusionary strategies.

Bringing together the literature regarding positive relationships between staff and students, the factors that are presented as being important characteristics of these relationships can be seen as: trust, respect (Munns et al 2006; Gorard and Huat See 2013; Aiscow et al 1998; Maddern 2012; Collinson et al 1999), fairness (Gorard and Hueat See 2013; Aiscow et al 1998) and showing care, taking time to get to know students and valuing students and their opinions (Reid 1999; Munns et al 2006; Cooper et al 2000; Collinson et al 1999; Gorard and Huat See 2013; Parsons 2011; Fogell and Long 1997; Weare 2004). These aspects of relationship development are reflected in the report by Hay-McBer in 2000, in interviews with 12 and 13 year old students.

Ecological Systems Theory and Attachment Theory

Research into the success of at-risk students and the impact of positive student-teacher relationships is supported by both Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Bowlby's Attachment Theory. Both theories look at the nature of influence and relationships over the individual and how this impacts on attitudes and actions.

Ecological Systems Theory, first put forward by Urie Brofenbrenner in 1974, placed the development of the person inside five different spheres of influence. This is an attempt to create a grand theory of human development and combines Systems Theory and Ecological Theory, while drawing on elements of Cognitive-Behavioural Theory, Social Support and Stress and Coping theories (Rothery 2001). The five spheres of influence identified by Brofenbrenner exert an increasingly weaker influence over the individual, starting with the Microsystem which exerts the most influence. This sphere encompasses the direct environment the person develops within. The next sphere is the Mesosystem in which these main influences interact with each other. These areas can be mutually supportive or be in conflict. The next system is the Exosystem which contains issues that may or may not impact directly on the individual but impact on those around them and then, indirectly, on to the individual. Next is the Macrosystem, which is the culture or sub-culture of social class contexts in which all the other systems are embedded. The last system is the Chronosystem which places all the other systems in a time frame and encompasses ecological or other changes to the individual (Rothery 2008).

To understand this better we need to look at the two main theories used by Brofenbrenner. Ecological Theory states that every organism adapts to the requirements of the environment. There is a transactional process between the organism and the environment that causes mutual adaptation to enable the organism to better survive and thrive in the given environment. The environment we are in demands adaptive responses but can also give us the resources to help respond appropriately and in a way that supports positive development. Differences in the

perceptions of each actor can create different responses to these demands: there is then a balance of demands and supports. Systems Theory is concerned with the interconnections between us all as people embedded in various social systems. This theory suggests that cause and effect is circular and not linear, that any event can affect everything else and in the end impact on the original actor. We do not act in a vacuum, our social setting mediates how we respond to situations and there is a reaction to every action that impacts on the development of the individual. These theories combine to provide the basis for the Ecological Systems Theory. This is an holistic approach to the development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner 1992, Rothery 2001).

Shaffer and Kipp (2010) stated that the positive development of a person is likely to be optimised by strong, supportive links between Microsystems in the Mesosystem. The Youth Justice Board of England and Wales (2005) included factors such as poor parenting or conflict at home or in the community. If present in an at-risk student, these factors will then be in competition with school and wider societal expectations, and can cause conflict in the young person's micro and mesosystems and into the systems beyond. Therefore forming more positive attitudes towards school and teachers/peers could be seen as a protective factor against exclusion by helping to counter alienation, poor commitment and the influence of negative peer groups and poor community attachment.

The relevance of this Ecological Systems Theory to the proposed research is implied by Rothery (2008), when he states:

‘we are all happiest when we are recognised in our communities and are recognised as competent and credible - as having something of value to offer’ (p93).

To be included in the school environment therefore can be recognised as having ‘something of value to offer’. Others’ views of the at-risk student, or at least the students’ perspective on these views, can offer some protection from exclusion. School communities have an important inclusionary role

here in setting up culture and practices that encourage positive attitudes towards all members of the community. Teachers have an important role to play here in mediating and managing students' behaviours (and those of colleagues) that develop self-worth. Teachers are in positions of power in schools and how they behave towards others in the community works towards setting this culture and mediating interactions between staff and students, students and staff, and students with other students.

The impact and influence of positive inter-personal relationships is then seen as a critical factor in positive development of the child/adult, as is the need to feel an active part of a community. Can these elements of engagement be important when considering school staff or the school itself? We can further this debate with a look at another theory of human development, Attachment Theory.

Attachment Theory is another area of psychology that can be seen to support research into positive inter-personal relationships in school. It is concerned with the need to be close or 'attached' to another person for positive development to take place, even into adulthood (Stalker 2008). This theory came about due to work by John Bowlby in the 1940s on the impact of the separation of young offenders from their mothers. This attachment, or lack of it, the study concluded can then affect and guide feelings about the self, others, expectations of the self and others, behaviour of the self and relationships with others. Positive attachments from an early age can provide the confidence to move away from the attachment and explore the environment, helping further development. These positive relationships can remain with the individual and are trans-generational, allowing the individual to form positive relationships with others in their future life (Stalker 2008). Stalker (2008) states:

'Humans cannot be self-reliant until they experience a relationship in which an attachment figure can be relied upon for their normal and natural attachment needs' (p119).

Could then this 'attachment figure' be a member of school staff or these 'attachment needs' be supplemented or supported by a member of school staff – or, indeed, be supplemented or supported by the school as an organisation? Both Ecological-Systems Theory and Attachment Theory imply the importance of positive school experiences and positive relationships within the school for positive development. Social and Emotional Learning Programmes (SELs), as already discussed, use this attachment as a major feature of their interventions with at-risk students, including those at risk of permanent exclusion (Battistich et al 2010; Catelano et al 2002; Greenburg et al 2003). There is then a theoretical base to suggest that positive inter-personal relationships in the school environment are important to help avoid exclusion.

It would also appear to be obvious that changing policy and in-school structures has an impact on inclusion for at-risk students; these changes can help set the culture of a school and shape approaches to these students but these changes alone may not be enough to help prevent some permanent exclusions. They may help to manage students better but may not allow for full inclusion in mainstream education. On the issue of structural changes to engage students who are at risk, Weare 2004 states:

'taking a whole school approach helps children with problems' (p56)

While Cooper et al (2000) claim that:

'.... government policy plays a highly significant role in facilitating and constraining the work of teachers in schools'. (P11)

Greenberg et al (2003) look to changing school structures and, in fact, Government policy to address what they see as the evidence-based importance of fostering student attachment, engagement, social and inter-personal skills; they suggest a comprehensive approach to the implementation of programmes through teacher training, school reform, Government policy, teacher training and support.

Previous evidence and comment in this chapter indicate that changes to schooling at a national policy level does have an impact on local level implementation and the nature of inclusion and exclusion (development of NERS, school league tables, the development of inclusion in education, and the perceived importance of dealing with disruptive students). The argument here is that this 'structural approach' is one aspect of effectively including those students who are difficult to include; engaging students on an inter-personal level may well be another. In which case, Greenberg's call for this to be structured and driven into schools may be an answer.

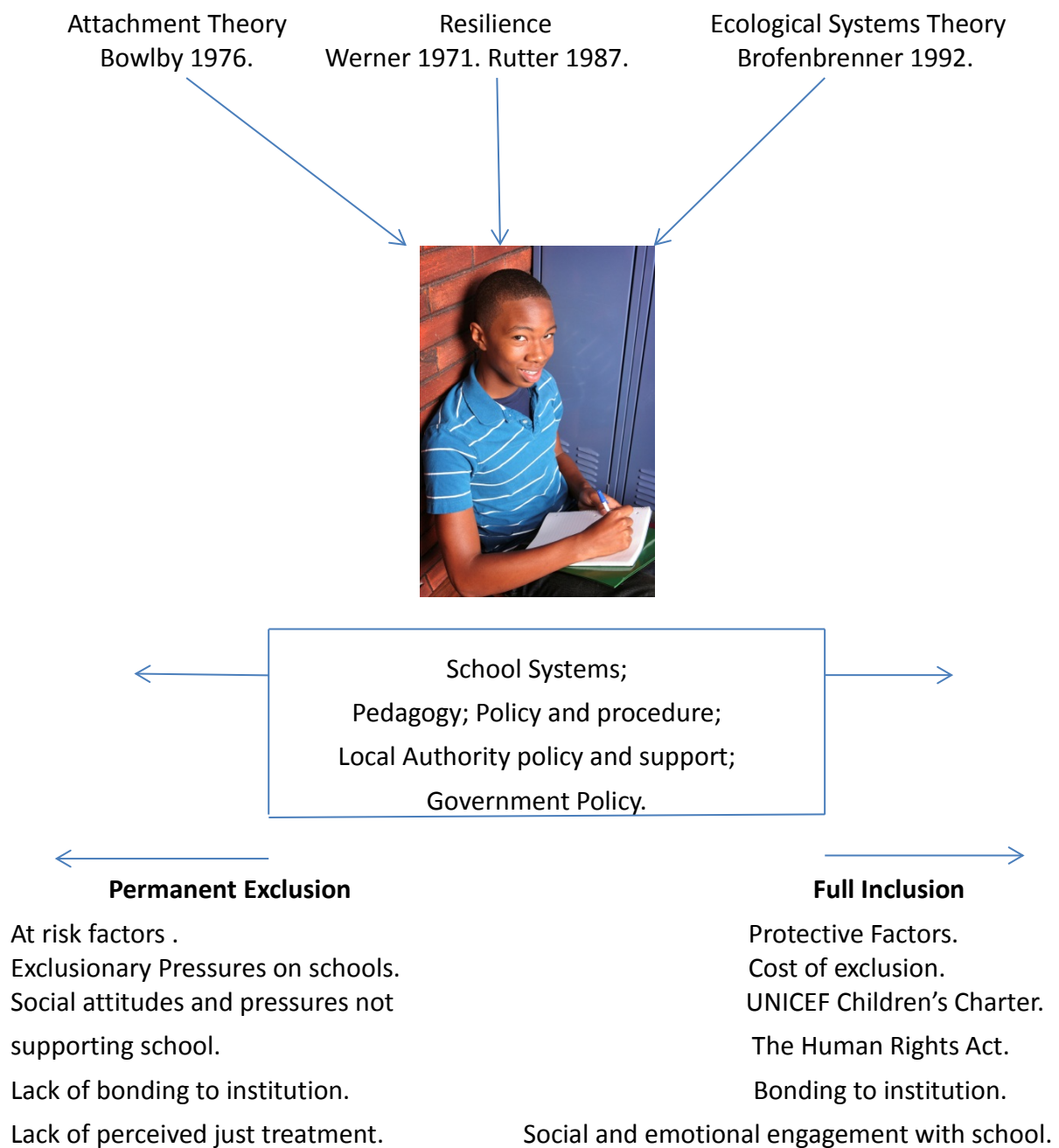
Where the literature is not so conclusive is the decisions and actions taken by the individual as an aspect of inclusion/exclusion. Social factors, the impact of others and the environment around them are the main risk factors. Resilience and self-regulation as protective factors imply an in-student response to their experiences and it is here, in the interactions between environment, its influences and student action, that exclusion or inclusion take place. Students are not passive recipients of what happens in their environment and with their social interactions, they have decisions to make over a school day which will have an impact on their achievement. The assumption that it is solely what teachers do and the environment that students live in that will decide exclusion or inclusion does not allow for these student decisions. There is little doubt that environment and experiences of social interaction are crucial to inclusion or exclusion from school, however students make decisions within these influences, and these decisions are also crucial. Listening to the stories of those students who have succeeded, who had high risk factors for exclusion, could help in understanding the nature of these decisions.

Conclusion

The literature regarding the views of excluded students or those achieving against the odds and remaining in mainstream education tells us that a part of the experiences of success or failure is the ability of the student and the institution (and its staff) to engage on an emotional/inter-personal level and the bonding to the institution or its staff the student experienced. Research suggests that

there is a need to develop positive student-teacher relationships to encourage school engagement; achievement and emotional engagement can help keep at-risk students in school. There are other factors in play with regard to exclusion from school, being school ethos, structures, national and local policy, the political intervention into student behaviour also into school exclusion and the risk factors that a student brings to their chosen school. Ecological Systems Theory and Attachment Theory both imply the need for a human to bond with others and have supportive social systems around them. The research obtained from students who succeed against the odds suggests that they have the ability to self-regulate and may also exist in a space that is not full inclusion but allows them to avoid exclusion. It would appear though that the views of these at-risk students who have remained and succeeded in secondary education have been largely ignored. The views of those who have been permanently excluded are present in the literature, as are the views, in a recent study, of University students who have succeeded against the odds. These studies, along with work on social mobility and on developing the protective factors that these at-risk students require to remain safe and in education, lead us to make some assumptions about the nature of the school experience for this target group. The question remains of whether these assumptions are borne out by the experiences of the students themselves? There is a perceived need in the literature for this type of narrative research (Mclauchlin and Teirney 1993; Cooper et al 2000; Chase 2011; Shopes 2011). Mclauchlin (2003) and Lincoln (2003) both call for specific research into the narratives of the silenced and marginalised in society; at-risk students currently in education could be seen to be in these categories. Therefore the aim of this research is to investigate what is perceived as important by those students who have managed to remain and succeed in education, and who have significant at-risk factors. This, hopefully, will then allow educational practitioners to better understand what is effective, inclusive educational practice for this vulnerable and potentially marginalised cohort.

Figure 1.
Diagram: Inclusionary vs Exclusionary Factors from the Literature.



Chapter 2. Methodology

*“Not everything that can be counted counts,
and not everything that counts can be counted “ (Albert Einstein)*

‘All....sociologists have are stories, some come from other people, some from us, some from interactions with others. What matters is to understand how and where the stories are produced, which sort of stories they are and how we can put them to honest and intelligent use in theorizing about social life’ (Miller and Glastner 2011 p136).

Introduction

Ensuring that the research design and methodology will be the best fit for answering the research question is essential. This careful selection is also key to the production of credible and trustworthy findings (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). The need to select research candidates appropriately, contextualise, listen to and understand the stories of at-risk students necessitates a research methodology and design which allows for their stories, opinions and other data to be gathered safely, respectfully and effectively. What was required of the research was to gather data from school records, narrative data from its subjects and key staff and to be able to justify the inclusion of these subjects in the research. This chapter will look at these methods of gathering and analysing this data, triangulating it and identifying subjects appropriate to this study. It will also discuss the ethical issues surrounding this research.

Epistemological Stance

The choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context. These questions then attempt to understand action in the social settings in which it occurs and help to better explain the action and understand the consequences. Chase (2010) states that personal life records which are as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material as it is a construction of events and not just a description. Using a

variety of approaches to construct personal life records that are specific to the research question would provide the necessary context to the narratives obtained, the narratives themselves being a part of these life records. This raises epistemological issues, an assumption in this research being that truths can be multiple and subjective (Denzin and Lincoln 2011 pg 564-565; Charmaz 2011) and that there is a need to uncover the truth according to the students so we can better understand and contextualise behaviours and therefore attempt to promote inclusive pedagogies (Gorard and Huat See 2013).

The research project gathered the stories and views of the student experience from the participants and not the observers as an understanding of the experiences of the social actors would then imply a qualitative approach to the research (Erickson 2011; Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Bold 2012; Hitchcock and Hughes 1995. Bold (2012) and Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) call for a qualitative research method, in particular in educational settings, to enable a better understanding of action, improve practice and develop reflective practitioners. This research is grounded in practice in an educational setting and aims to inform that practice.

Where possible, conditions for the research were kept the same for all candidates but the need to be flexible, in particular during the interview processes, caused difficulty in quantitative data collection. The flexibility for the students to tell their own stories of how they succeeded in secondary schooling would not be available using a rigid, qualitative approach. The collection of coded data, as with grounded theory, following interview was considered. However this in itself can provide a constraint on the study; its objectivist foundations can assume that a neutral observer obtains data having no influence on the data collected (Charmaz 2011). This can be factored into the research by using 'Constructivist Grounded Theory' (Charmaz 2011) where this researcher influence is acknowledged and realities can be multiple, an epistemological assumption taken in this research. This approach would also provide protection from narrative seduction, where the story itself is the

ultimate truth, and there is no examining the role of the social context or subjects involved in its collection. It is seen by Charmaz (2011) as being useful for mixed methods researchers.

Mixed Methods Research (MMR) was another research design considered. The flexibility in collecting qualitative and quantitative data, and using a variety of research tools to collect this data, reflected the needs of the research project. The assumptions that the different research methods used will cancel out the weaknesses of each providing validity (Teddle and Tashakkori 2011) appears on the surface to be of use to this study. There are difficulties with this research method as outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), who see this as having paradigmatic difficulties, in particular with epistemology. These discussions aside, the assumed structures when planning a research design using MMR could be seen as constraining inside a project that required flexibility to investigate themes and ideas as they were uncovered.

The research then developed an understanding of student experiences based in their real lives and from their point of view. This research also needed to ensure that the students selected met the at-risk and academic success criteria and that there was an understanding of their school performance and data (historical and current). This brought into consideration a case-study element to the research design (Yin 2009). Yin also suggests a multiple case study design for use in qualitative studies. The preserving of particularity and unity inherent in a case study (Reissman 2011) suggests epistemological difficulties for the research. The subjects will have similarities in their background and risk factors due to the selection process but have very different life experiences. The assumption of particularity of the group would be difficult to justify outside of the selection process. Reissman (2011) suggests that general statements about phenomenon that look to generalise about human processes across individual participants would suggest a category and not a case approach. Case-centred approaches can create categories (Reissman looked to medical studies to illustrate this point), however narrative inquiry that looks to identify themes would imply a category-type and not a case-type approach. An element of case study for each participant was used in data collection and

in the study of each research participant to justify their inclusion in the study and to contextualise the narrative data collected.

Using a 'Bricolage' approach to qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Kincheloe 2001) allows the researcher to pick those methods that best suit the area being researched but also requires the researcher to be competent in the methods chosen. This implies flexibility in the research design to respond to and further interrogate discoveries during the research. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe Bricolage as being pragmatic and self-reflective, using the aesthetic and material tools of the researcher's craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods or empirical materials that are at hand. Bricolage is then a 'bits and pieces' approach to research that enables the researcher to use a variety of materials and strategies to achieve results in qualitative research. Kincheloe (2001) states that Bricolage is by nature interdisciplinary, and is an approach that is controversial but also that should be embraced if the interest is undertaking quality research. At its heart, though, remains the need to use appropriate research methods that are justified, valid and develop the research.

Triangulation is important as being a strategy to help validation. Denzin and Lincoln (2010) offer a word of caution here in not using triangulation as an alternative to validation; this has to be inherent in the research design and structure. This 'triangulation' could then be fulfilled through the use of the selected methods inside the research design. The correct identification of the research participants, the interview data, key staff interviews and use of focus group data can be used to provide this validity.

The correct identification of the subjects involved in this research is important if the results are to be valid. The subjects selected needed to be at risk of permanent exclusion as a precursor to valid data collection. A study of the information held by the school, including exclusion records and records of disruptive behaviour both inside and outside of the school, views collected from the subjects themselves and key staff and parents/carers if appropriate, needed to be undertaken to ensure that

this selection was rigorous. The information gathered and discussed also assisted in the final analysis of the narrative data. The issues of validity, reliability, objectivity and ethics will be dictated by the research methods used within the Bricolage approach. Reliability will come from the ability of the researcher to elicit stories that have value and plausibility from the subjects and by clear identification of the role played by context and researcher as a participant, as well as the subsequent analysis of the data gathered. Validity here then is a function of the research process that allows for the subjects to narrate their experiences, minimising contamination from the context in which they were collected.

The need to listen to the narratives of the research participants was central to the research. Chase (2010) supports narrative enquiry as being able to answer questions around biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them. The initial question of what is hoped to be gained from this research is evident here; if the research aim is to understand the stories of the subjects then a study of these stories as a part of narrative inquiry would serve to help answer this research problem. The idea of exploring memories and obtaining the subjects' deeper understanding of events is evident. This became important in the research process. However Narrative Research would appear to contain more than an analysis of the stories proffered by research subjects. Reissman (2011) claims that narrative vocabulary is important to consider, as is deciding upon terminology if narrative concepts are to be used (pg 313). An understanding of vocabulary and structure of language is important, in particular for subjects participating in narrative research, as how else will they be able to take a full part in a discussion without this understanding? This has implications for validity in narrative research. Perakyla (2011) views validity of narrative research as largely being a factor of the next speaker's interpretation of preceding action. This implies gauging each participant's ability to understand the conversation and be able to participate fully. This perceived need to analyse the form of what is said, and not just the content of what is said, is supported by Chase 2011 (pg 423). Bold (2012), referring to narrative enquiry, states:

‘In summary, over the past few years I have engaged with narrative approaches to learning, professional development and research. I have done so because such approaches have enabled the development of critically reflective practitioners. I choose narrative initially as a vehicle for learning about practice and for developing skills of critical reflection, and subsequently as a valid, reliable and most appropriate research method for students in professional educational and other social contexts to use’ (p8).

The difficulty in validating the results obtained from qualitative research is one of its criticisms. This is a particular concern in narrative research that employs no controls and is based on reports from subjects which could be subjective, changeable over time and difficult to replicate. Specifically relating to narrative inquiry, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that validity of the account is not the issue, it is the explication of the meaning attached to that account that is the aim of the study. They also call for the careful location of evidence in the narrative to support any claims made.

The use of interviews in Narrative Inquiry is supported by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), Chase (2011), Denzin and Lincoln (2011), Bold 2012 and Thomas (2011) and Qu and Dumay (2012). Miller and Glastner (2011) provide support for the qualitative interview:

‘Those of us who aim to understand and document others’ understanding choose qualitative interviewing because it provides us with a means of exploring the points of view of our research subjects while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality’ (p133).

It is the reality as experienced by the research participants that is required to gain the understanding of their motivations in achieving against the odds and what those who run education in this setting can gain from this understanding. An interview technique that elicited their points of view was crucial to the quality of the information obtained, allowing the students’ realities to be explored.

Semi-structured interviews which are based around a set topic can have set questions. These can be deviated from by the subject, provided the flexibility to probe and provide the space for the candidates to tell their stories and give their opinions. These were also in depth and happened over different sittings. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that the interviewer needs to have some idea of what they will ask and perhaps a set of questions to guide the process, but also the mind-set of allowing the interviewees to tell their story, not just set pieces of information. The semi- or unstructured interview is aimed at obtaining the facts of events to gain insights into the topic being researched. The interviewer cannot be outside the research project and their objectivity can be an issue for valid research. Miller and Glastner (2011) state that objectivity comes through fairly representing the points of view expressed by the subject during an interview. In these conditions, similar questions can expect similar answers and that this should be judged as reliable enough if good interview data is collected; therefore validity can be seen as a function of the quality of the results obtained. However, this view poses a problem as it would imply that the end justifies the means, that poor methods can produce valid results. The validity of the results as has been argued is impacted by the research methods applied. In an attempt to answer criticism of objectivity/validity levelled at narrative interviewing, Miller and Glastner (2011) suggest that any subjectivity from the interviewer must be visible in the research. Holstein and Gubrium (2011) suggest that validity is a function of the respondent's ability to convey communicated experiences. They also state that interviewing is a collaborative experience and therefore impossible to free of contaminants; all involved are implicated in construction of narrative reality and that interview data are products of interpretive practice. Raulston (2010) suggests that qualitative interviews are not looking to determine truth but to assess the plausibility of interpretation when compared to other plausible interpretations. This provides validity, reinforcing the view that the quality of the interpretation of the research results provides validity. Bold (2012) says of validity and reliability that the methods need to be suited to the specific research contexts with which students are engaging and that this would then mean that the outcomes of their research are likely to be valid and reliable. The choice

to use qualitative interviewing included inherent problems of validity: misinformation, lies, evasions, fronts, incomplete knowledge, subjective perceptions based on past experiences and current conditions, subjects only giving what they are prepared to reveal, opinions and perceptions change over time and there are differences in 'reality' (adapted from Chase 2011). However these criticisms can be answered by taking into account the interactional and social nature of the interview. The skills in eliciting the truth as it is seen by the interviewer and subsequent data analysis can help negate these criticisms. Miller and Glastner (2011) say of objectivity, that it is not an objective world and objectivity is an accomplished aspect of human lived experiences. Eliciting narrative, according to Chase (2011), involves an intensive interaction with the narrator. Bold (2012) states that there must be an acknowledgement of the relationship developed with the person being interviewed. Both then require that this interviewer-interviewee relationship be a factor in the research design and subsequent data analysis (refer to the 'insider research' section later in this chapter).

Holstein and Gubrium (2011) state that all interviews are active: '...researchers embrace the view that the interview is a process of experiential animation and capitalise upon interviewers' and respondents' constructive contributions to the production of interview data' (p151).

They agree that the participants in the interview create the meaning that comes from them. This animation, they feel, should be embraced by the interviewer and hinting at or inviting interpretations from the respondents is a part of this process. Interviewers may suggest orientations to and linkages between aspects of the respondent's experiences. They suggest that narrative agency is activated, stimulated and cultivated through the interview and that this is a valid part of the process. They warn against coaxing answers from the respondent and state that the goal is to document how interview narratives are produced in the interaction between the interviewer and respondent, without losing sight of the meanings produced or circumstances that mediate the narrative process. This approach fully embraces the role of the interviewer in creating meaning through the interview. This approach is referred to as 'animating interview narratives'. A criticism of

this approach then is that the active involvement of the interviewer could influence the respondent's answers, causing difficulties with validity. The expertise of the interviewer is therefore paramount here. This criticism is answered by Holstein and Gubrium (2001) by stating that the interviewer must dictate the interpretive frame but provide the environment whereby the production of a range of narratives can develop. The research conducted attempted to animate the interviews to produce this richer data, while ensuring that the research participants could produce their own narratives, stories and explanations of their school experiences.

To help triangulate the research data, focus groups were used. A focus group can be seen as an interview involving a number of people at the same time (Gibbs 1997). Bold (2012) supports the use of focus groups for those with no voice; this provides multi-voiced responses. Gibbs states that what distinguishes a focus group from a group interview is the data that is then produced due to the interactions of those being interviewed. The focus group can be an effective strategy for supporting the marginalised in society (MacConville 2007; Ainscow et al 1998; McLaughlin and Tierney 1993). The nature of the students studied in the research project (being at risk of permanent exclusion from school) makes them vulnerable. Bold (2012) suggests that focus groups have a similar set up to a semi-structured interview. The same issues of validity, reliability, objectivity and desired outcomes are present (refer to the above discussion on interviews). Wilkinson (2011) views the focus group as a method of collecting qualitative data, its hallmark being a question to a group. The difference between a focus group and an interview is that the interactions between the group members can also be a factor to study. This allowed the research project to offer support to the subjects in delivering their narratives and give a second opportunity to express their lived experiences, assisting with triangulation of the research and offering enhanced validity and reliability. The same questions as for the semi-structured interview were used, however potentially embarrassing or harmful personal experiences and similar issues around family background were avoided to ensure that the candidates were protected. Issues around the nature of their school experiences, what they felt supported them and what they felt created barriers were discussed during the focus groups and the

interactions of the subjects being interviewed can be seen during the research as impacting on the interview data collected.

All interviews were recorded and data was analysed directly from these recordings; looking for themes through a narrative enquiry lens. It was decided not to transcribe the interviews as to maintain the 'voice' and the context; this then enabled the use of elements of narrative enquiry to check for meaning, providing richer data including inflection, intonation, emotion, timing and to help ensure that the next speaker correctly interpreted preceding action during both the interviews and the focus groups (Perakyla 2011). Understanding that interviews are constructed and that the interviewer is a part of this construction, the aim of the data collection was for the researcher to be a conduit for the voice of the participants (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Where themes or ideas relating to students being included and/or succeeding in school were mentioned these were noted and used in this paper. These results have been tabulated in an attempt to outline patterns found among the eight candidates.

Direct quotations were used in the analysis of the student narratives. These were selected to help contextualise or illuminate the research question and to engage the reader and help to express the students' views fairly (Miller and Glastner 2011). Using the direct student voice for key points helped to get their voices heard, limiting the influence of the researcher. This is a difficult juxtaposition, as the researcher had control over the use of these quotations; however the criteria for selection, being where there was direct evidence from the students that related to the research, was consistent across all interviews. Quotations were also used to assist the reading in gaining a better understanding of the student and to better explain their behaviours. Any direct quotations helping to contextualise these behaviours were also included.

Issues around the fair representation of the students and subjectivity from the interviewer were answered by the use of quotations in context during the research report from the subjects, a contextualising of the subjects inside the school and clear reporting of what was said by each

subject. The subjects were given access to the sections of the final report that directly referred to them for comment and corroboration. Subjectivity where the interviewer was concerned was taken into account by a clear statement to each subject regarding the research theme and in questions related to the inter-personal experience of the students. This subjectivity is also evident in the report itself where the inter-personal nature of the educational experience is discussed.

The use of a semi-structured interview inside the narrative and constructionist genres was the best fit the research project proposed. This approach had the flexibility to detour and follow a line of interest, while keeping to the original research focus; it also allowed for new insights to emerge. It is the quality of these interviews and the data that they generated that will determine the quality of the research project.

Insider Research

This need to decolonise the research process raises the issue alluded to in the above section of 'insider research'. In relation to this issue of relative power and control over the interview situation, Pelias (2011) raises the difficulty of reflexive writing and the researcher and the writer being a part of his or her inquiry. The difficulties that arise in this process, according to Pelias, are that the researcher can be a contaminant, affecting the outcomes of the research, thus reducing its validity. The researcher can be blind to issues of the research that could be important to identify and also could be, in effect, writing the research before it has been carried out, due to preconceptions gained as a result of being close to the research and its subjects. Being an insider can also prevent the researcher from seeing and acknowledging how their position contributes to some of the issues experienced by those in the research group. Although, as previously acknowledged, there is a risk of the students during interview telling the researcher what they think he/she wants to hear.

Conversely, the benefits of the trust developed with the target students and the experience of the researcher in speaking with students to elicit their truths in this context needs to be also taken into account. Ensuring that follow-up interviews were held along with a focus group for each student

(with the exception of Anna) and a use of student school files, prior knowledge and key staff to support the interview process were used to help provide the validity that could be in question. Another problem faced is the need to be objective when writing about the school setting, one in which the researcher worked as a senior leader. Being able to compare the resources used for inclusive practices in other secondary settings and therefore gaining an understanding of the outcomes for the at-risk cohort in these settings was important when commenting on the target school. The experiences gained by the researcher having been employed, largely with vulnerable and at-risk students, in 12 schools prior to the current employment along with targeted work undertaken with other schools in and outside of the Local Authority helped to provide this objectivity, giving comparisons in provision and outcome.

One of the benefits of insider research is that trust is developed with the research subjects, allowing for richer data to be collected. The researcher has an understanding of the situation in which the research subjects reside, allowing for sensitivity in approach and a better understanding of the context in which data is collected. In the context of this research, the researcher can be seen as an insider, having worked in the target school for over 10 years and with relationships with the target students developed over at least five years of their secondary schooling. However, to claim the researcher is a part of the culture as students experience it would not be correct. This separation between teacher and student can allow for a study of their experiences as distinct from the interviewer's experiences and could be a barrier to a full understanding of the students' truths. It may also provide a set of taboos, with students feeling that there are subjects that cannot be discussed. The challenge then is for the interviewer to be skilful enough to elicit these truths whilst acknowledging that this 'separation' may be contaminating the results. The knowledge of the students' backgrounds and school histories allow for a more in-depth analysis of the data, while an ability to alter the line of questioning to best suit the individual student enables them to better extract their truths. This was borne out in the interviews with the students: after a period of reticence during the initial session, they began to talk - often freely - about their school experiences.

The insider knowledge of the students' backgrounds and histories allowed for the interviewer to triangulate information from the interviews as they progressed and, at times, informed follow-up questions to further probe the students' experiences. The use of background data also enabled the research to look at areas of the students' experiences that may be a taboo for them - for example, Anna's home experiences, Tina's relationships out of school, Karl's drug use and selling. This direct access to the research subjects allowed for students to be able to read the research as it developed and fulfilled an important ethical function of full disclosure and consent.

An issue for the interview process was the relative authority of the interviewer and research subjects - the interviewer (researcher) being an assistant head teacher at the school, the research subjects being current or ex-students. The interviewer was known by and knew the research subjects. This was of benefit in particular in the cases of the ex-students. Without this personal knowledge and these relationships, it would have been likely that they would not have engaged in the research: a father of the one of the ex-students arranged for his son to attend and helped to deliver him to school for the interviews. In this case, the school had received this young man - who had extremely negative experiences in his previous school - and staff had worked very hard and effectively with the student and his father to get a positive outcome. It seemed obvious that the father felt indebted to the school for this and therefore informed his son of the interview times, dates and gave him a lift to the school for them. The relationships developed with the subjects over their schooling could be seen to cultivate a level of trust that assisted in the interview process and in the subjects feeling confident to talk.

A difficulty with the already established relationships and position of authority was then the subjects being placed in a position where they either felt indebted to take part in the research or under pressure to participate. An attempt to alleviate both of these potential difficulties involved engaging parents in the decision to become involved in the research; a pre-research and interview briefing regarding the nature of the research, the ethical considerations being made clear and the voluntary

nature of engagement in the research were expressed. All interviews were held in school; although this was the setting for the relative positions of power over the students' schooling it is also a place known to the students and one where they were likely to feel more at ease. As considered in the research design discussion, it would not be possible to factor out of the research the relationships between the interviewer and the subjects. These could be seen as a strength in terms of the knowledge of the community, understanding better the key players in the students' lives, the culture they were educated in and having first-hand knowledge of their school experiences. This personal knowledge and developed relationship would very likely have an impact on the nature of the answers given and this will need to be taken into consideration during the discussion and conclusion of the research.

Chase (2011) states that the concept of the interview needs to be decolonised. This refers to the power imbalance that research often produces, one of power over another, to assert one's will to gain the desired data or that would provide false data due to the relative positions of the interviewer and interviewee. This decolonisation is due to the often negative experiences of the subject(s) being interviewed. This view is reinforced by Denzin and Lincoln (2011). The qualitative interview is inherently a matter of the interviewer not being an outsider, but being a part of the process. The potential difficulty of access to the community/culture being studied is reduced where an understanding of this community/culture is developed before the interview takes place. This would enable a successful interview and one which illustrates the flexibility of questioning and drilling down to produce a record of the real lived experience. The ideal interview then engages the subject, makes them feel a part of the process as an equal, encourages trust and enables them to give their stories or narratives as a true reflection of what they have lived and experienced; thus attempting to decolonise the process. Reid (2001) found and spent time with truants for his research, playing football with them and talking to them during school time, in an attempt to gain the trust of the truants; he was at pains to explain that he was not a teacher or a police officer, hence attempting to decolonise the interview process. The interviewer then needs the skills to be able to create this

environment and ask the questions in a manner that will elicit these truthful (albeit subjective) responses.

This position of relative power and control over the interview questions/animation of the interview can be seen to create control bias and be a tool used to answer the research question in a manner that confirms the research premise. However, this approach assumes that the interview participants are preformed (Holstein and Gubrium 2011) and not free actors who express their own views. All interviews rely on interactions and subsequent data collected on interpretive practices. Due to the interpretive nature of both the data collection and analysis it is important to explore the positionality of the researcher. This position is outlined in the chapter 'A Personal Perspective'. The idea that positive relationships are important in educational settings as a protective factor from exclusion and to promote success is clearly held by the researcher; it is this 'belief' that helped form the research question and indeed the motivation to research this as a valid topic. Another motivation for the study was to hear the voices of this often marginalised cohort, one for whom school is often a struggle and who, although supported, can be difficult to educate and whose views can often be ignored. The interpretive nature of the study was then approached with a genuine desire to hear what this vulnerable cohort had to say about their relative success at secondary school. Although key themes searched for in the data collected were regarding relationships, other data was collected when it was related to school success. This can be seen with the themes that emerged from this study.

Ethical Issues

The basic ethical approach to all research when using humans as subjects, according to the British Psychological Society (2010), can be seen as:

- Valid Consent;
- Providing full information on the research to the research subjects;
- Managing physical and psychological risk;

- Respect for autonomy;
- Preserving dignity of the subject;
- Scientific value of the research;
- Social responsibility;
- Confidentiality;
- Documented consent;
- Maximising benefit, minimising harm;
- Giving advice to participants when necessary;
- Debriefing on the research project;

These issues stem from basic moral concerns the concept of treating others as you would wish to be treated, the protection of individual liberties and the promotion of fairness and justice (Shamoo et al 2012). Christians (2011) states that the basis of this ethical approach is historical and has as a centrepiece individual self-determination and the universal problem of 'integrating human freedom with moral order' (p104). The area of ethics is seen by Gregory (2003) as being large and extremely complex. The basic principles are in many ways common sense, but these may become complex when they are applied to research projects as illustrated in the British Psychological Association Guidance (2010). Although there are basic ethical principles for any research on humans, these alter and are subject to debate; based around the general principles of being treated appropriately and having self-determinism, they are also dependent upon the type and design of research (Christians 2010, Chase 2011). There are some specific issues of ethics when dealing with vulnerable subjects (British Psychological Society 2010; Ryen 2011; Chase 2011). This was particularly pertinent for this research. Chase (2011) argues that narrative inquiry also has specific ethical issues attached as there is greater exposure for the narrator, which can create vulnerability. This requires a full debrief on the finding and engagement with the subject(s) regarding what is published and the confidentiality of the subjects. Chase (2011) calls for an ethical attitude towards qualitative research and that research needs to be explained fully to candidates so they can decide whether to engage in it. This advice in the light of the proposed research is important. There may be existing relationships between the

researcher and the subjects which could place the subjects in a difficult position when asked if they would like to engage in the research process; this may also have an impact on issues of confidentiality and what they state they are prepared to allow to be published. Protecting the candidates from psychological harm during and after the research and during any focus group work was a particular issue. Consenting to having aspects of their home life and previous school experiences included as a part of the case study was handled sensitively and in a manner that protected the subjects. This may have led to different levels of disclosure and differing case study notes in the final research which then may cause problems of validity and generalisation, if any is discovered. However, during the research, all candidates wanted their ideas recorded as fully as possible; it became therefore the researcher's role to ensure that anonymity was secure for all candidates and that their narratives would not cause them upset or harm. The idea of a flexible approach to research, that may have had to be replicated in the final analysis of the research as different subjects agree to differing consents, did not emerge. The idea of fully informed consent, subjects being fully aware of the research and its component parts and a full debrief (including reading the final research before any publication) was in place to allow for self-determinism and autonomy, protect dignity and prevent psychological harm. The research proposal was submitted to Middlesex University's ethics committee and passed prior to any interviews taking place.

All participants in the research gave informed consent along with their parent(s) for involvement in the research process. This involved a verbal briefing to the subject and parent(s) outlining the purpose of the research, how the research would be conducted and assurances of their anonymity. It was fully explained that the subjects would be able to read the research that involved them and be able to remove any parts they decided should not be included. The ethical permissions, signed by both parents and subjects, were explained and discussed by both parties. The storage of the data collected was secure; where and how this data would be stored was explained to parents and subjects. The vulnerable nature of the research cohort placed an emphasis on protecting them from the results of any potentially damaging disclosures or their identity being discovered. However, four

of the eight subjects stated that they would either like to have their real names used in the research or that they were ambivalent regarding their anonymity. It was explained to them that they would remain anonymous in the research.

Research Design

The Methodology chosen involved a Bricolage approach including elements of case study, thematic narrative inquiry and qualitative data collection. The original design involved screening each student for risk factors; however, it became apparent that some of the students who were seemingly most at-risk were not necessarily the most difficult to include in schooling. This also posed a separate question of who is then most at risk of permanent exclusion: the students with the poorest behaviour or the ones with the most at-risk factors? As predicted by the literature search, there was a strong overlap between the two but there were anomalies. One student was dropped from the research as, although he had been close to permanent exclusion, he had low at-risk factors. It is worth noting, however, that his story of school experiences had similarities in his risk-taking behaviours and what he felt had supported him in eventually achieving in school to the eight students researched. It is also worth noting here that there are no generally agreed risk factors, and the ones chosen (albeit based on research) may not be complete. As a starting point for the screening of appropriate subjects, key members of school staff were asked to recommend students who they considered to have a cluster of at-risk factors and had been difficult to manage through secondary schooling. Data was then collected from school files and at-risk factors collated. The gaps in some of the school data were filled during the interviews themselves. Such factors as the number of bedrooms and people living in the current home, or if the household had a car, were all absent from school data. Issues around gangs, availability of drugs and criminality in the locality of each student were triangulated with the student via questioning. Knowledge of these areas from the local police and staff working with the students was also used to identify these issues for the students. This triangulation of data helped ensure a more complete contextualisation of the subjects.

A list of questions was originally drawn up for the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3). These increasingly became guidelines during the interviews as the students would often tell their own stories and experiences in their own way; this frequently negated the need to ask a specific question or open up an opportunity for a different probing question to be asked. The structure of the interviews as originally planned was not always evident in the interviews themselves; the interviews developed and were animated (Holstein and Gubrium 2011) to elicit richer data. The openness of the students, and their desire to tell their stories and be heard, was sometimes surprising. Repeat interviews were used - often just once but, in two cases, twice; this depended upon the perceived need to understand further and probe for clarification of data collected, and to allow the student to feel comfortable with the interview process. It was during the second or third interview that the student seemed at ease enough with the process to begin to engage fully and discuss issues of their inclusion and support. Often the first interview became a setting of the scene for the student. Each time a repeat interview was arranged, the consent of the student was gained and a date and time agreed.

Similar questions were asked during the small focus group sessions. These involved two students with the subjects' consent. Each time one of these was arranged, the students concerned were asked if their identity could be revealed to the other student involved in the focus group; this enabled them to be aware of with whom they would be interviewed. The pairings were carefully considered by the researcher to avoid any possible clashes between the candidates; they either had to know each other and give consent to their involvement (in most cases) or not know the other subject. Again, they were given the chance to not be involved if they felt uncomfortable with the process. One subject did not want to participate in a focus group and therefore the data collected was based on the two interviews held. During these interviews, the questions and probing were adapted to avoid any personal life experiences or home situation that may have been embarrassing for the student or could have placed them in a vulnerable position. For example, information about criminality in the family or drug use was not referenced. These interviews were used solely to

interrogate and triangulate the information already collected, and attempt to create an environment where the students felt supported and more able to express their views. These focus groups were useful for triangulation but did not provide significant new information, although the interactions between the candidates did provide verification of their views stated previously. It would appear that they did not require the participation and support of another subject to speak about their school experiences, although they were again empowered to discuss these and reinforce the views they expressed during their individual interviews. This may be a function of the relationship developed with the researcher during their school career and them perhaps feeling comfortable in this setting, therefore not requiring support from a peer. On one occasion, the small focus group became almost a bragging session where the two candidates discussing school experiences seemingly hoped to impress each other. During this episode the subjects were given the freedom to speak about these issues but the questioning that followed was aimed at getting them back onto the subject of the research.

As the research progressed, it became apparent that eliciting the views of key staff could provide a fuller picture of what had happened for each student across their secondary schooling (refer to Appendix 4 for these questions). It was decided to use these key member of staff to help create a more complete picture of the subject; this included their in-school experiences and any issues out of school that were seen to impact their in-school behaviours. These interviews were held for each student with the Head Teacher and key workers separately (the key member of staff was a Head of Year, Form Tutor or Behaviour Support Worker, depending upon the student) in an attempt to complete the picture of the student, their behaviour, needs and at-risk factors. These proved very useful in contextualising the interview and school record data collected. The information collected posed a difficulty in its confidential nature, in particular regarding home life.

The interviews were held over a period of two years. Each academic year end provided a new set of potential research subjects. Out of eleven students asked to join the research, nine agreed. Two did

not. One, a female who had strong at-risk factors, made this decision perhaps as a function of her very low confidence and self-esteem. The second student was more confident and articulate and thought about the invitation but declined to join. This decision was more difficult to rationalise, although he came to school as a fair access student (being permanently excluded from another Local Authority school) and it may have been his experiences prior to attending this school that led to this decision.

Data Storage

School record data was collected from the school's secure archive and copied into a word file stored on a password-protected school laptop and desk top computer. This was then anonymised and copied up into the research paper. Some information was copied as written notes which were kept in a locked filing cabinet at the home of the researcher. Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder with the consent of the subject and their parents. This information was saved on the digital voice recorder and backed up in note form in the note book stored at the researcher's home. During the research, the digital voice recorder was kept at school in a locked cupboard inside the researcher's office, which is locked when he is absent. This data was also anonymised when used in the research paper. Access to the data stored was only given to the researcher and specific data concerning each candidate could be accessed by only that candidate. No other member of school staff has access to this.

Chapter 3. Research Interviews

Student Details

For the purposes of this research, students have been selected initially based on previous behaviours causing them to be in a group seen as at a high risk of permanent exclusion at the target school along with subsequent success in formal examinations at the end of Year 11. This screening process was then triangulated by the high-risk factors as defined by the Youth Justice Board of England and Wales (2005) and also the high-risk groups as identified through a data analysis of recent permanent exclusions in England. It is also important to take into account the higher risk of exclusion from students in low socio-economic groups who are entitled to free school meals, those who have a recognised SEN, being older and being from an Afro-Caribbean background (Maddern 2012). The students selected all have clusters of these at-risk factors.

All students interviewed for this research are listed below; the information given outlines the reasons for their inclusion in this study. It also serves to provide contextual information to help interpret the interview results.

Table 1. Research Participants Selection and Context

Name	Abdul	Keith	Anna	Joe	Karl	Mike	Tina	Tom
Age at interview	18	16	19	17	18	16	16	16
Sex	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male
Ethnicity	Somalian	White British	White British	White British	Black Afro-Caribbean	White British	Black Afro-Caribbean/ White British	White British
Free School Meals	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
SEN*	SA + ESBD/SLCN	S ESBD	SA+ ESBD	SA ESBD	SA+ ESBD	SA+ ESBD/MLD	SA+ ESBD	S ADHD/ESBD
Number of FTE**	8	1	4	2	3	0	1	2
Attendance below 90%	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Achieved at least 'expected' academic outcomes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Car in family	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Low income	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family conflict	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Live in area of social deprivation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Conflict in family.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Availability of drugs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Support Years 7 to 11 (11-16)	M B SEN1 SEN2 EWO	M B C TI CAF SEN1 SEN2	M B TI C CAF EWO	M B C	CAF B TI C EWO	CAF B SEN1 SEN2 FS	M B SEN1 TI C EWO	M Med B SEN1 SEN2 EWO TI

Support Codes: **M** – Mentoring; **CAF** - Common Assessment Framework; **B** - Behaviour intervention (small group or one-to-one); **SEN1** - Support for learning in class; **SEN2** - Support for learning out of class; **FS** - Family support via school liaison; **CAHMS** - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services interventions; **TI** - In-school therapeutic intervention; **C** - Counselling. **Med** – Medication; **EWO** - Intervention for low attendance; *Special Educational Need. SA - School Action, SEN identified and school intervention in place. SA+ SEN identified, school intervention in place, outside agency involved. S Statement of SEN, legally binding document outlining interventions required to support a student with an SEN; ** FTE - Fixed Term Exclusions from school.

Abdul

This student joined secondary school, bringing with him high at-risk factors. He came to the UK as a refugee, fleeing Somalia where he witnessed armed fighting and a school friend being shot next to him. He spent three years in a refugee transit camp in Ethiopia before being allowed entry into the UK with his mother, to join his father who had managed to obtain work. He was away from his father over the period that he was in Ethiopia. His father continued to travel for work, often being away from the family home during Abdul's time in education in the UK. He had been in the UK for two years at primary school, where he had moved school once due to his disruptive behaviour. His transition report outlined a history of aggressive and violent conduct towards staff and students. His academic data on transfer highlighted his low ability in English and Science (no score recorded on Key Stage Two Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) taken at the end of primary schooling, age 11), and Maths being below average at Level 3. His Cognitive Attainment Test (CAT) scores showed a student of low average non-verbal skills (90), below average verbal skills (67) and just above average quantitative scores (105); this gave a mean score of 87, with 100 being average. He has a stammer, for which he has received specialist input, and was on the EAL register at level 1, meaning that he required support for his language development. He has moved house four times since primary transfer. On entry to school he received a package of support both in-class and on being withdrawn from class to meet his emotional, behavioural and language needs. During the first three years of his secondary schooling, up to the age of 15, his behaviour followed a similar pattern to that shown by his primary record. The fixed term exclusions (FTE) he received were for disruptive conduct, fighting with other students, and defiant and rude behaviour towards staff. His attendance was below 80% during Years 9 and 10.

He became involved in drug use at this time and received a police caution for possession of cannabis. From this age his behaviour began to improve; he became more able to manage his emotions and deal with upsets, although though he remained on the school's at-risk list. He managed to pass

English, Maths and RE GCSEs at grade E and pass a Level 2 Science BTEC (equivalent to two Grade C GCSEs). These scores are above what would be expected based on KS2 SATs, with the exception of Maths, where he achieved one level below expected. He transferred to 6th form where he studied another BTEC Level 2 course. He has since moved to Turkey to play semi-professional football. He lives with five siblings and his mother and father when at home in a three bedroom house in the London area; his father often lives away from the family home.

The Head Teacher explained that Abdul had anger management issues and that staff had worked hard to give him a sense of self. He stated that it was important not to demonise him. Abdul was close to permanent exclusion and had received a Governors' warning due to his confrontational behaviour. Abdul had formed positive relationships with mainly male staff.

Abdul explained that it was being rude and aggressive to staff that placed him at risk of permanent exclusion. He was very keen to share his early years' experiences. His responses painted a vivid picture of where his aggressive behaviour may have originated. He spoke of being in a village in Somalia and his formal education consisting of learning sections of the Koran and being able to recite them, hearing gun shots and having his school attacked by rebels and a friend being shot in the leg in the playground. He then detailed escaping to Ethiopia to a refugee camp with his mother and sister where he was left to his own devices, playing and fighting with the locals for three years and receiving no formal education before arriving in London as a 9 year old. He described his anger at not having been educated and being academically behind his peers at primary school. He spoke in particular of his anger at feeling that he had been a good student in Somalia but realising that all he had learnt was not valuable in London; that he had spent all his time learning the Koran and was then expected to be able to do Maths, Science and written work. He stated that he found the work difficult and did not like being worse than others at it.

He explained his aggressive behaviour as being caused by his perceptions of others' anger at him. A real issue for him was staff or students being in his personal space and looking angry, particularly when he did not understand why.

"I get upset with people's faces, their body language... you can be rude without saying anything"

He also stated that he got ignored by other students when he was trying to be friendly:

"Students keep ignoring me... it winds me up"

Additionally, he felt that others lacked respect for him, which meant that he was happy to respond in an aggressive way to staff or students if they dealt with him in an angry manner. He said:

"I don't like it when people shout... I don't see the point... since I was a kid I don't like shouting... I see it as disrespect".

Another issue for this student was that he became angry when he thought that he was right and was not being listened to:

"When I'm not wrong and right I get angry... If I think it's unfair... I get angry"-
- "I don't really like rules...but I know there are rules and if I was asked to do something I would... most of the time I was suspended I was doing what I was asked but I was speaking to them [teachers] when doing it".

Abdul explained what helped him to sort this behaviour out and begin to achieve at school.

He stated that it was three staff in particular who helped him to do this. He felt they understood him and could calm him down before he did anything 'stupid'. He talked of his Head of Year:

"... he used to calm me down the way he talked to me"-
- "he would find out about me... he would talk to me more...we were having a normal conversation".

He reiterated this when asked if there was anything else that had helped. He stated that because these key staff had helped him he would then behave in class and try to learn to pay them back. He stated of one member of staff:

“... [staff name] was helping me, I would help [staff name] as well... I would make [staff name] feel good about his work”.

He claimed to be doing this for the member of staff who had helped him because “changing someone’s life makes you feel good”.

He stated that if it were not for these three members of staff in particular he would not have remained in school; his relationship with them helped him as he felt that they would not get angry with him or make him feel disrespected. When asked about his improved use of language, he claimed that this was not the issue for him; it was how people looked when they dealt with him, their proximity and his relationship with them that were the biggest issues. He stated that if he knew a member of staff and felt they were going to help him, he was able to calm down; the few staff who dealt with him and understood him when he got into trouble were the reasons that he began to succeed in school. This enabled him to cope better with his anger and any negative interactions he had with other staff or students. He also felt that the support he received from staff had helped him to deal with personal issues in his local community.

The key themes to come out of the interview and focus group regarding Abdul’s school experience were: being respected, including body language and tone of voice; *repaying* staff who listened to and helped him; responding positively to staff who gave him time and taught him well; avoiding students who he felt upset him and being able to deal better with his anger.

Keith

Keith transferred from a local secondary school during Year 8 as he was at risk of permanent exclusion. He had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. He came from a split home, living mainly with his mother but, when this relationship broke down, he moved in with his father, who has served a prison term for assaulting his mother. He has one sibling and moved house twice during

his secondary schooling (not including the moves between parents' houses, dependent upon his relationship with them at any given time).

There was a history of drug use in his extended family (with whom he is close). On entry to school he received a package of support, both in class and on being withdrawn from class, to meet his emotional and behavioural needs. His Key Stage Two SAT results showed a student of about average ability, with a particular strength in Science (Levels being Maths 3, English 4, Science 5). There were no CAT scores for this student as he transferred during Year 8. His primary school record outlined a history of upsets and aggressive behaviour towards his peers. This pattern of behaviour was replicated at his first secondary school, leading to him being at risk of permanent exclusion and prompting his transfer to a second secondary school.

His GCSE results showed that he had performed as expected with two grade Cs, four grade Ds and a grade E. He has since transferred onto a level three courses at a local college of Further Education. During much of his time at secondary school he lived between two houses; his mother has two bedrooms for herself and three children (including Keith), while his father has a one bedroom flat.

The Head Teacher stated that Keith had poor general well-being and care. Keith was involved from his enrolment in mentoring and intervention schemes to meet his needs. Getting Keith into school and providing him with the chance to talk and be listened to were the keys to enabling him to begin to succeed. Keith was given positive male role models for the first time ever and engaged with members of staff who supported him in school. The Head Teacher felt that enabling Keith to develop positive relationships in school was crucial to him attending and eventually succeeding in school.

Keith spoke about his life before attending his current secondary school. He was brief in his answers. He stated that he had several arguments with his mother and lived with his father, even though he

only had a one bedroom flat. He now lives full time with his mother as his father is in prison. He had arguments with his close family but got on well with his cousin (he had previously attended the same school and had also been at risk of permanent exclusion). At his primary and first secondary school, he often got into fights with his peers due to being bullied and being wound up easily.

“I used to get wound up easily... I had a lot of fights both in primary and secondary school”

The teachers, he felt, blamed him for the fights and he got into a lot of trouble with them. He was rude to some of the staff, including a Deputy Head Teacher when he was upset, and felt he was being treated unfairly. He, however, felt that he had support from one teacher, his Head of Year who listened to him. He stated that he moved school because he was told he would have to leave or be permanently excluded. He applied to his current school as his cousin said that it was a good school.

He was then asked about his experiences at his current school and why he felt he had achieved. He suggested that his behaviour had improved.

“I used to get wound up easily... I get left alone more here”

He required prompting about what had improved and at what he felt he had achieved. Keith said that he had made some good friends. He had a couple of friends at his last school but he would argue with one of those from time to time. He stated that the most important factor for him achieving was that he was left alone by other students and that he was then settled in class and could learn. He said that students and staff had helped him and he was grateful for their support.

The key themes to come out of the interview and focus group regarding Keith's school experience were: improved relationships with peers; friendships and peers who helped him; not feeling bullied by peers; staff who taught him well; staff who listened to him and supported him; the body language of staff and students during interactions; being able to deal with his emotions better.

Anna

Anna left school in 2011 after completing a BTEC Level 3 (equivalent to two 'A' levels) and gained access to a foundation degree course in Dance. She is the first member of her family to move into Higher Education. She transferred from primary school having been identified as an at-risk student. She had a history of emotional difficulties and attendance problems and was on the SEN register for ESB; additionally, she received free school meals. Her behaviour across her secondary schooling up to 6th form (post-16) reflected this, with upsets and rude, aggressive behaviour towards peers and staff. Anna also had periods of absence from school. Her parents are separated; her father has a history of criminal behaviour (including violence) and alcoholism and had served time in prison. Her mother was known to abuse drugs and alcohol, while her elder brother was a gang member and involved in criminal behaviour. This brother was in prison during the latter part of her 6th form schooling and the beginning her degree level study. She became caught up in the local gang culture during Years 10 and 11, during which her attendance and behaviour were poor.

Anna's data on transfer from primary school indicated a student of average intellect. Her Key Stage Two SAT results showed a relative strength in English, with Maths and Science on Level 3 and English at Level 4. CATs scores reflect this with her verbal score being 95, non-verbal score at 88 and quantitative score of 80; this gave a mean of 88, which is a low average value. She lives with her father and brother in a two bedroom house; there is no car in this household. She has moved house once during her secondary schooling, although she has lived with both mother and father who had different housing over this time. This student declined to be a part of the focus group, only participating in the interview process.

The Head Teacher stated that he was very worried about Anna, in particular her involvement with drugs and the care she was receiving at home; her father could be difficult and there were issues of illegal activities with her mother. The school offered her dance which gave her something with which

she really engaged. He felt that Anna was given a good pathway through Key Stage Four which met her academic needs, along with a chance for time-out, staff to talk to and a support timetable. The Head Teacher explained that “...we did not give up on her” and “We need to give students every strategy we have.” He stated the need to not demonise and to be on a journey with students such as Anna.

Although this student and her father had given permission for her to participate in the research, she was reticent when asked about her background and how this may have affected her school progress. Her home life was documented by the school as being chaotic, with police involvement, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and family breakdown. She stated that when her home life was going well her attendance was good. Her relationship with her family was important but this could be volatile, particularly in relation to her brother’s gang membership and her relationships with local gang members. She identified poor relationships or ‘fall outs’ with peers as being a problem for her, particularly in Years 7 to 9 (11 to 14 years of age) and how ‘stupid’ she had been to get involved in them: “Yeah, I was an idiot...[laughs]”.

She was not proud of her school exclusions, although at the time it was more important for her to not back down in front of other students. Anna stated that feeling ‘disrespected’ or peers or staff ‘talking down to her’ made her feel angry; this, along with supporting her friends if they became upset, were the main causes of her problems in school when she attended.

“I used to get really angry if I felt I had been disrespected or I felt I was in the right...I could be really mouthy”-

-“ If one of my friends became upset with another student or teacher I was thinking I was helping them by being angry as well... I think this is stupid now (laughs)”

She felt better able to deal with potential upsets now and suggested that the work she had been involved in at school around dealing with conflict had helped, but she stated that she felt it was

more about the staff taking the sessions, the time they spent with her and faith they put in her that made her try to improve. She said of one member of staff in particular:

"[member of staff] loved us... never gave up on me".

And generally about staff she felt had helped her:

"...having a belief in me was really important, I did not always believe I could do things and so I did not turn up to school, I then felt guilty if these staff were trying to contact me so I came in and tried".

Anna was asked why she felt that she managed to achieve and move on to a degree course. She stated that it was the faith that staff had shown in her over the Years 10 and 11 and in the 6th form.

"I could be an idiot and not try in school, having teachers encouraging me and supporting me and not giving up on me helped me to come in and try".

The time and effort they had put in she felt she needed to repay; she felt a debt and did not want to let some key staff down.

"I felt really guilty if a member of staff had tried really hard at something for me and then I did not turn up or get in trouble... I would want to get it right for them and to not feel guilty"-

- "some staff [names here] spent time with me helping me when I was upset. I am harder to upset now and can deal with situations better..."

When asked about her friends and if they had helped her come to school, she said:

"Most of my friends left school to go to other courses, them doing well helped me but I also sometimes stayed away from school to see my friends... they were not all from school and some did not have jobs or courses... this could be difficult as I got used to not coming in and hanging around with them..."

She also identified her father as wanting to help her attend school and achieve, although the situation at home often got in the way.

The key themes to come out of the interview and focus group regarding student Anna's school experience were: friends achieving; staff having faith in her and not giving up on her; wanting to repay staff for their work and effort with her; staff support; arguments and fights with peers; respect from staff and students; home-life support and problems; being able to better deal with her upsets.

Joe

Joe has two siblings and lives with his mother. His father is separated from his mother and lives about 10 miles away. He has a brother who is 14 years younger than him and a sister who is one year older. His sister became pregnant and NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) soon after leaving school at the age of 16. He has a school history of disruptive behaviour, mainly arguing with staff and other students. When upset he would refuse to follow reasonable instructions and escalate situations through arguing and rudeness. Attendance was a serious concern with Joe, his parents being fined twice for poor attendance. When in school his behaviour was erratic, in particular over Years 9, 10 and 11 (13-16 years of age). He was removed from two subject areas during Year 11 due to disruptive behaviour and underperformance. He was internally excluded for a total of 10 days and was externally excluded twice, the last time for five days for serious disrespect and rudeness to a member of staff. At this point the Head Teacher was considering permanent exclusion. The local area does have gang problems, although it is reasonably affluent; however, Joe claims to have had no involvement in any local gang activity. Attendance over Years 10 and 11 was under 80%, with over 50% of his absence unauthorised.

Joe came into secondary school with Key Stage Two SAT scores of English 4, Maths 4 and Science 4. His CAT score (SAS, the average of the three test scores) was 103, putting him in the average band. He passed eight GCSEs with one grade A (in a subject which he states was his favourite), one grade B, three grade Cs, two grade Ds and a grade E. He has moved into the 6th form where he is now studying a mix of 'A' levels and Level 3 courses.

The Head Teacher reported that Joe had challenging parents. He stated that there was a lack of consistency from home which did not help him to cope with school. Joe is very bright but hard to teach. The Head Teacher felt that school staff gave him consistency and scaffolding to help him improve his behaviour and boundaries. He had the freedom to choose and decided to remain in school in the 6th form. Other key staff who had supported Joe through Key Stages Three and Four stated that the greatest difficulty he had to overcome was his attendance; then his behaviour at school (which was poor) could be addressed.

Of his home life, Joe stated that his mother and father were separated and lived about 10 miles apart. He lived with his mother and younger sibling and was in contact with his father. Joe felt that Year 10 was his worst, stating that he could not be bothered with school. He got into a lot of trouble arguing with teachers. There was some police involvement outside of school, although he claims to never have been arrested. Now he is in the 6th form, he says that he is more settled: he says that one of the reasons for this is that teachers treat him differently. Joe identified arguments at home as being an issue; if he argued with his mother in the morning, it set him up badly for the day. This does not happen anymore. Joe felt that he got into trouble more with staff who ordered him about and shouted at him. If he identified a member of staff with whom he felt insecure, he felt “this will go wrong” and in class then it usually did.

When asked why he started to attend better and achieve, he felt that the mock exams in Year 11 were the catalyst, saying that he felt *“I am going to fail in life”*.

When asked if he had received any assistance with improving his behaviour and attainment in school, he identified four staff members to whom he felt that he could talk: one who provided in-class support, two being behaviour support workers and one being a teacher. He said of school at the time of the interview *“I like it here, I like the teachers”*. This, he felt, was important for him to achieve.

When asked about his relationships with other students, Joe felt that he now associated with different students; this has helped him, his new peer group is more enthusiastic about school and his relationships are more positive. He said that he now has different people to speak to. He claimed to feel much happier in school and less stressed than he used to be. Now he feels that staff and students have changed their attitude towards him. When asked specifically to name the factors that have helped him to begin to achieve and behave better in school, he stated that there were three, each being of equal importance:

1. Students being at school now for the same thing (he felt that previously there had been students who were a bad influence on him).
2. A decision he had made to achieve and better relationships with staff, he said, "I kind of decided that I wanted to get somewhere."
3. His improved relationships with staff.

Joe stated that it was important to have friends in the class; if he did not get on with the students then he would underperform and misbehave. He said: *"I want to get good grades."*

He now studies and concentrates more than last year. He said of Year 10 and 11 that he would not take risks if he felt uncomfortable; he now feels comfortable in school.

He felt that he changed following the threat of permanent exclusion and that he had made a decision to begin to work and achieve.

"I do not want to be the guy working in McDonalds for the rest of my life."

The focus group was held in May 2013. Joe and Karl were present for this interview. During the focus group interview Joe stated of his parents:

"I did not want to fail... my parents were moaning ... I wanted to shut them up".

Joe said that it was important that teachers showed 'genuine care' for students, which included spending time with them after school and providing resources. He felt that having people looking out for him and helping him was important; this he related to staff and students. He stated that continuity of staff teaching him was important, as was the idea of 'care around you'. He said:

"Everyone messes around with subs [substitute or cover teachers]."

He explained the importance of having a familiar teacher and how he found it difficult to come to terms with members of staff leaving school. He found it challenging to form working relationships with new members of staff. Joe also stated that it is really important that staff keep their word and that staff listened to his point of view. He said of how staff treated him and how he responded to this treatment: *"Be proud of me and I will be proud of myself"*.

Areas identified by Joe as being important for him in school were: relationships with staff; relationships with students; making a decision to achieve following an exclusion; being listened to; feeling staff cared for him; proving he could achieve to his parents; needing to avoid failure; knowing staff who taught him.

Karl

Karl lived with his mother and his older sister during his pre-16 schooling. He did not have a history of behavioural difficulties in primary school and performed well over Years 7 and 8, although he was placed on the SEN register in Year 9. His parents had separated and his father had moved away during primary school; this split was acrimonious and he lost contact with his father. His behaviour began to deteriorate in Year 9. The area he lived in had easy availability of drugs and gang-related problems. His relationship with his mother deteriorated when he was in Year 10 and he left her house to live with father, who was now in South London. The journey to school was difficult and his attendance began to drop. He was homeless over parts of Year 11, staying with friends in the school area; over this time his attendance improved, although truancy from lessons increased. He became

involved in a local gang, which had links to crime and violence, starting at the beginning of Year 10. He received three Governors' warnings (a sanction used as a final warning before permanent exclusion is considered). His increasingly disruptive and unsafe behaviour in school including using and dealing cannabis on the school site, arguing with and using abusive language towards the Head Teacher and damaging a toilet door by kicking; this led to him being permanently excluded from school. He had a month out of school pending permanent exclusion during Year 11 and returned to school on appeal. The Governing Body reported that Karl had persuaded them that he could change his behaviour. He was accepted back into school and given more support from specialist staff from the behaviour support team.

Karl entered secondary school with SATs scores of 5 in English, Maths and Science. His SATs SAS score was 102, placing him in the average band. He achieved one GCSE at grade A, three GCSEs at grade B and 4 GCSEs at grade C. He remained at school for the 6th form and has since moved on to a university placement studying at degree level.

The Head Teacher identified Karl's mother having cancer as being part of the trigger to his poor behaviour, along with the acrimonious split between his mother and father. He stated that Karl was homeless for a while and dealing drugs to get money to survive. He was permanently excluded due to his resulting unsafe and disruptive behaviour but returned on appeal. He started to engage better in school following this. The Head Teacher and staff gave him an individual care plan which helped him to improve in school. As Karl began to achieve, he began to better his relationships with staff and this helped him to be more successful at school.

Of his primary school years, Karl stated that he was a good student but his father left home due to domestic issues; he then left the country for five years, later returning to the UK. Karl identifies himself as finding it difficult to be told what to do and to feeling the need to speak out if something is unfair.

Karl had gang affiliations from the age of 15 explaining it as 'getting a badge' and respect. When his father left home, he stated that there was a lack of discipline; he saw the gang he got in with as 'older brothers'. He was attracted by the excitement and the 'financial side'. But then, about the gang and his subsequent leaving, he stated: *"...as you get older the stakes get higher"*.

He admitted to using and dealing drugs during school time: this was one of the factors that lead him to be permanently excluded before he came back to school on appeal. He realised that this was behaviour that was putting his school placement at risk. The gang was not supportive of education. He said he was smoking cannabis at night, waking up, putting himself back together and getting into school. He was smoking cannabis during the day as well. He felt he was 'just after fun' if he had been smoking, he realised the negative impact this was having on his schooling. At this point, money was important and the gang helped him to get this. He saw school as getting in the way.

Karl said of his poor attendance in Year 10 and parts of Year 11 that these were related to the gang affiliations he had formed. He felt that he did reasonably well in school considering the situation he was in. He was staying up late and had a "do what you feel attitude". He did not care about exclusions as they boosted his ego. Many of the gang members had been permanently excluded from school or were not attending.

Karl stated that there was nothing positive to take from the gang of which he had been a part. He grew out of the gang; at the time he was respected for being a rebel (by both the gang and some of his peers in school) but now he sees it as a waste of time. He explained to the other members of the gang that he could not be a part of what they were doing during the day. They accepted that and felt that anyone who was smart, and who suited school, should remain in the system. Most of the gang members were drop outs from school. He decided to speak to them about getting an education.

Following his permanent exclusion from school, other students signed a petition to have him reinstated. In relation to this support he stated: *"I thought I was special...I felt supported."*

The support of students when he was going to be permanently excluded made him feel untouchable. He saw supportive teachers as being people to fight in his corner if things went wrong. If he had not met the 'deviant group' in school he would have done well in school. Karl had been looking to be popular - it was important to be a part of a group and, at that time, this was more important than school.

He was not living at home during Year 11, although went back home during that year, which was when he stated that 'the big trouble started'. He stayed with friends on the floor of their houses. He felt all of this contributed to the 'boiling point' which led to his confrontation with the Head Teacher. Following this, he stated that he:

"...grew out of it, you cannot live off other people... I thought about everything and I thought I don't want to carry on like this".

And:

"Teachers are not going to force you any more, you have to do it for yourself ... Why waste my potential?"

He felt that he could 'get somewhere' and so he should 'get on with it'. He saw other students being permanently excluded from school and decided that he did not want this for himself. He had felt that he was a part of a deviant group in school but at the time of the interview they are not a part of the school any more. The rest of the group left so he was not a part of that anymore and he began to think about himself. He questioned what the rest of this group would have to show as 'their achievement'? He said that: *"The fear of failure made me want to achieve"*.

Karl said that if he were not able, he would have not bothered and he would have dropped out like he saw other gang members having done. He felt that his father was supportive and that if he were not around he would have dropped out of school. He said of school: *"I thought no one cared"*.

He went on to say of his father: *"...[I] always need his opinions and ideas... it is important someone cares... I was the body and he was the voice."*

When asked, he said that this care could have come from a teacher. He said he was getting things wrong and needed guidance.

Karl's relationship with his mother had fallen apart, while that with his father gave him 'high spirits'; however, his behaviour deteriorated until he met with his father again, which happened about twice a week. It became a support for him and helped him, he felt, to remain in education.

Karl felt that there could have been more support at school and that school was against him generally. He said that in-school mentoring with a teacher would have helped, as well as peer support with a good role model.

He felt that he was not thinking straight at the time of the biggest problems. Following the final Governors' warning, he was praying that he did not get excluded. One of the Deputy Head Teachers then took an interest, but this led him to feel: *"Pretend they care and then go off again"* and *"If you got support I wanted to do well for them."*

Karl, when asked, agreed that having known staff was important. He got angry when teachers left and felt let down and not cared about. He became angry at one teacher who left and this made him angry at the school. By the time he had had the third teacher in Maths he had given up and was thinking 'What is the point?' At Karl said that it was important that teachers showed 'genuine' care for their students and 'implement what they say'. He felt that people looking out for him and helping him was important, as well as keeping the same member of staff as a subject teacher. Karl felt that achievement would inspire respect from teachers which would, in turn, help relationships. He also said that care matters a lot but so does the decision to change – which has to come first. When Karl realised that teachers were on his side, intending to help and keeping their word, it was really important. Karl claimed that he had more support following the 'warning' given by the permanent

exclusion panel and that members of staff were checking on him. This support helped him to get through issues he had in Year 12 with punctuality and attendance. At the time of the interview, Karl was in Year 13, which he felt was now better than previous years. He is glad that support is still there from staff but he feels that he does not need it.

The areas identified by Karl as being important are: relationships with peers; relationships with staff; care from an adult; the need to achieve; the need to avoid failure; being a part of a group; knowing staff; being 'popular'; the need to avoid failure; being 'left'; making a decision to change.

Mike

Mike is male, of white British descent and 17 years of age. He transferred to school near the end of Year 10 as a 'fair access student'; the Local Education Authority placed him at the school due to him having just moved into the area and him being a student requiring a high level of support. He had been close to permanent exclusion at his last school in another county, moving to live with his father in London due to his mother having difficulty controlling his behaviour. He had a history of disruption, arguing/swearing at teachers and fighting other students. His old school records were incomplete when received by the new school. However, discussions with the student, his father, mother and telephone conversations with staff from his old school gave a picture of a student who had very poor attendance (50%), had been involved in violent, racist and sexist behaviour, been arrested on more than one occasion and had a criminal record; he was also difficult to manage in a classroom setting and was in receipt of free school meals. Additionally, Mike had been banned from the school bus which picked him up in the morning and therefore began to attend school less frequently. He had been involved in alcohol abuse and the recreational use of cannabis. Mike had been refused entry into his first choice school in the Local Authority due to the high level of his needs. On entry to the new school, he had received a high level of support from two specialist staff employed by the school, a reduced time table to enable him to integrate and support for key subject areas. He had been out of school for two months before joining the new school. During his time in

the new school, he had broken his leg, which led to being in hospital for over a week and away from school for two weeks. Also over this time, his mother had died. Following the death of his mother, his biological brother (from a different father) moved to Cambridge to live with his father. There was no baseline data upon entry for Mike, although testing indicated a reading age of 8.4 years, a spelling age of 8 years and a writing speed of 8 words per minute, with poor written English. Subsequently, he received 25% extra time in national examinations. Mike obtained a place at a local college of Further Education to study on a BTec Level 1 Bricklaying course. He now lives with his father in a two bedroom flat, with a younger female sibling.

Mike passed Maths and English GCSEs at grade G and achieved a Double Award Level 2 BTec in Work Skills. He remained in education with an attendance rate of 84%, which included time taken off from school for his broken leg and his mother's funeral.

A female school behaviour support worker who worked with Mike stated that he came from a very financially poor background. There was a lot of opposition to taking him, based on his previous school history. Despite this, he was one of the easiest to work with as he settled down and wanted to work differently to how he had at his previous school. He needed help but was happy to receive it. He had suffered due to his parents splitting up and felt very guilty about being away from his mother when she died. What worked with him were boundaries to his behaviour. The behaviour support worker felt that he needed affection: *"I think he was missing that (affection) and I think he really needed it."*

The opposition to his coming to school was kept from him. School staff and students accepted his presence and worked with him; it was found that using lots of positives worked with Mike. There were incidences of truancy initially but these were worked through. He did not like being shouted at, but he would accept this from some staff if he had a good relationship with them. A lot of work was carried out with his parents regarding engaging them in his schooling.

The Head Teacher described Mike as an “...*amazing survivor*” and:

“A great example of how a care-approach, I don’t know how you could market it or describe it... We gave him space and worked hard with him... A good example of this place being a safe haven for our pupils.”

He felt that we gave Mike a non-judgemental, supportive package and it worked.

Mike admitted to not liking being told what to do. He stated that if he did not like the teacher he would get himself thrown out of the class intentionally. If he liked the teacher he would behave and not disrupt, even with students with whom he would normally get into trouble in the class. He spoke about his mother and was visibly upset when he did this. He stated that he would have changed his behaviour in his previous school and locality for his mother, if he could go back in time.

Of his previous school and life he stated:

“I was always in seclusion [an internal exclusion room] constantly.”

and:

“If I lived now where I was I would be in prison”.

He wanted a fresh start at the new school. His father was very supportive of him attending school and working hard. Mike felt that he had made friends and that the teachers at school had helped. He identified some teachers whom he felt had helped him particularly, listened to him and asked ‘how he was’; he stated that this is important for him. He also felt that the friends he had made had helped him.

Mike thought that the teachers in the new school were nice, and that he had entered the school with a good attitude. Secondary school helped him and he liked certain lessons. The good lessons and nice teachers encouraged him to stay in school. He said: *“I just wanted to stay in school.”*

He named two members of staff who supported him and gave him a chance. In his last school there was only one female teacher to whom he felt he could talk; he identified four at his new school. He always thought that there was somebody there for him at the new school. In addition, he felt that being closer to school now was beneficial as he could get up later.

When asked about the reasons why he felt happier at the new school, he stated that he was living closer, the school and his father were stricter, he could get on his 'own bus' and not the school bus, there were more supportive staff and friends and he had a better attitude. He said about his behaviour at the new school:

"I did not want to look like an idiot and be the only one messing around."

He felt that he received more help and support at the new school.

The areas identified by Mike as being important are discipline and care at home and in school, being listened to by staff, liking staff, wanting to achieve, being taught well and having positive students around him.

Tina

Tina is female and mixed race (White British and Afro-Caribbean), has two older siblings and lives with her mother and one older brother in a two bedroom house. Tina's mother stayed in living room whenever both she and her brother were home, as there is not a lot of room at home; subsequently, Tina had some difficulties studying there. Tina also stayed with an aunt if she was upset or had been arguing with mother. Tina's father currently lives in Brazil.

Tina transferred to secondary school with a history of aggressive behaviour. She was on School Action Plus of the Primary School SEN register for Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and remained at this level on the SEN register throughout her secondary education. Her mother was fined twice during her Year 9 schooling for Tina's poor attendance. Her behaviour during Years 7 and

8 was manageable with support, although it began to deteriorate over Year 8. She received just one internal exclusion but she had been identified by pastoral and classroom staff as being a concern. Her behaviour during Year 9 and 10 deteriorated further. Between Years 9 to 10, she received a total of 17 days in internal exclusion. Her behaviour in Year 11 improved, although she was internally excluded for two days for a fight with a fellow Year 11 student after school hours that had caused the police to be called. Also, Tina had local gang affiliations. Her SATs scores at the end of Key Stage Two were English 4, Maths Absent, Science 4. Her CATs SAS score was 89, placing her in the low average band. Her GCSE results are two B grades, three C grades, two D grades and one E grade.

Two experienced behaviour support staff who worked closely with Tina, her Form Tutor from Year 7 and the Head Teacher, were interviewed regarding Tina.

Tina had lots of fights at school, but she did not plan these. She was a victim in many ways of her background and the situations into which she, and others, became involved. She wanted to do well and this helped her to begin to achieve. Her close family were not always in work and she wanted to do better than them. Tina cannot let go of some of the other aspects of her life that can be negative and that is where problems often started for her. She calmed down over Year 11. Tina uses some key staff in school to fix problems and others as a sounding board to help her work out ways of solving problems. Relationships are very important to her.

The men and boys in her life have not been good for her; friends were bad influences in the past but she went on to form relationships with more appropriate students. Tina can be immature and attitudes reinforced by home often conflicted with school; additionally, her volatile relationship with her brother caused her problems.

Tina is afraid of people leaving her. She relates to some staff and will listen to them, but she also senses weakness in other staff and uses them. She is very sensitive and easy to upset. Her inappropriate use of social networking sites had caused problems and upsets for her.

Her maturing, achieving and moving away from bad influences, in and out of school, was identified as a key factor in helping Tina. She is quite bright and she began to attain better in school; this success led to her believing that she could achieve. Her attendance was poor but when her mother got a job and did not want her at home so much, this improved; in turn, this helped her to form relationships in school and begin to achieve.

Teachers need to be young or strong to work with Tina. Having people she knows teach her is very important to her: Tina can behave very badly and be vindictive with staff she dislikes or with whom she does not have a relationship. She was used as a mentor for younger students which helped her to gain confidence.

Tina's main behaviour support worker feels that she needs to be treated with respect:

"relationships are key, she can be very easily influenced".

When she had a lot of time at home (after absences from school or during holidays) she became very difficult to teach. Attendance to school is the key to Tina achieving: this allows her to develop the relationships that she needs to thrive in school.

Tina stated that she did not get involved in crime outside of school but was associated with people who did. She identified her 'big issue' in school as being fighting with other students; she had recently had a fight with a fellow student outside of school, which she stated was not her fault but was quite serious. It was a violent incident that involved police intervention. She stated that she needs to show people and teachers what she will not put up with. She feels that she should have been permanently excluded from school for her behaviour as she has been poorly behaved with staff and students. She identified issues of fighting and arguing in primary school and this was the case after Year 7 (which she identified as being a settled year for her, although acknowledged that she had been internally excluded once). In Year 8 she began to get into a lot of trouble for poor

behaviour. She identified being spoken to disrespectfully as an issue for her. Respect is identified by her as being a 'big deal'. On this topic she says:

"Someone talking down to me is a real issue."

She identified her coping mechanism now as ignoring those who upset her. She stated that she only argues now with those who mean anything to her, like her brother and her mother.

Tina said that she will work for teachers she likes and that the identity of the individual is more important than how good they are at teaching. Of teachers who work well with her, she said that they *"have to be friendly"*. When asked what a good teacher was like, she replied: *"A good teacher....we get along."*

These practitioners teach 'fun lessons' and have a 'friendly smile'. Fairness was identified by Tina as being important, along with telling the truth and being a 'nice person'. She felt that a good teacher gives respect, needs to listen, is someone around whom students feel relaxed, creates a good atmosphere in the class and students can have some 'banter' with them.

Tina feels that her reactions to staff are more about who tells her to do something than what they say. She feels protective of her relationships with staff:

"I would not like a bad feeling in the class... a teacher I am close to".

She identified that she responds to staff who do not shout a lot; this could affect her relationship with staff in a negative way. However, she also said that teachers earn the right to shout at her by supporting her and developing a relationship. A good relationship with her allows teachers to discipline her. She works well with teachers who speak on friendly terms to her. She went on to say that teachers have to be able to control their class to earn the right to discipline her and she lacked respect for teachers who could not do this.

Tina also recognised that she sometimes works for teachers with whom she does not have such a strong relationship, as she knows the teacher wants her to achieve. She said she needs to be recognised as a human being by staff. She talked of the importance of some teachers being able to recognise when she is having a bad day and support/remove her. Talking of a specific teacher who supports her:

“She just knows me as a person”.

She feels now that she could get along with any teacher. She also stated that she has to know the teacher and that she does not like change. She claims that she now avoids students whom she feels may get her to do the wrong thing or upset her.

There were key members of staff who have helped her to improve and achieve in school from the Creative Arts department, where she studies in KS4 and spends a lot of her time rehearsing. She feels that she can currently cope a lot better than in the younger years but still needs the support. When asked if she needed the key staff she identified to get her through school, she replied.

“I know that.”

The issues identified as being important to Tina are respect, being listened to, staff relationships, student relationships, being treated fairly, feeling cared for by staff and making a decision to achieve.

Tom

Tom is male, white, of British descent and 16 years old. He lives with his mother and has five older female siblings, two of whom are still living at home. His father died whilst Tom was at primary school. He moved house during secondary school. He transferred from primary school with a history of poor and disruptive behaviour; this continued into secondary school. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and takes medication for this. Despite receiving a high level of support, Tom was excluded

internally in Year 7 for a total of seven days. In Years 8 and 9 he received a total of 20 days of internal exclusion and had 15 whole school detentions (given for more serious breaches of the school's behaviour code of conduct). During Year 9, his school attendance became an issue and his mother was fined for his non-attendance, although his mother has been identified as being supportive of school. He also had a five day fixed-term exclusion, which appeared to have an impact on his behaviour on his return to school; it became more manageable following this. During Year 10 his behaviour improved further, with him receiving one day of internal exclusion and two whole school detentions. During Year 11, he received no exclusions and five whole school detentions. Over Years 10 and 11, most detentions were received for being late to class or missing faculty detentions given for lack of homework. His Level 2 SATs scores were English 4, Maths 4, Science 4. His GCSE results are one grade A, two grade Bs two grade Cs and two grade Ds.

The Head Teacher, two experienced behaviour support workers involved with Tom, and his Head of Year state of him: Tom began to improve his behaviour end of Year 8/beginning of Year 9 when he decided that he wanted to do well; he had done some research and found ADHD students doing well post school. Subsequently, Tom's grades began to improve. However, he loved an argument and this is often where he came into conflict with staff. If he did not respect staff, he would not behave; he would tell them this and was described as 'a very honest boy'.

Tom tried to play staff off against each other and regularly needed removing from class: getting him to meet the basic expectations for all students was a challenge. He felt that he was protected and therefore could do anything: the five day exclusion led him to realise that this was not the case.

There were racist incidents, although he always felt that he was not a racist. Tom was described as 'a lovely boy who wants to do well'. One behaviour support worker stated that relationships were very important to him and that he does not cope well with losing people: he was considered to have never got over his father's death and he was not allowed to go to the funeral.

The staff interviewed regarding Tom could count six members of staff who they felt had helped him achieve in school. Tom's key worker identified an important moment for him, regarding his improved behaviour in school, as being when he hugged his mother. This was something he had not done before and he was prompted to do this by the key worker. She said of Tom that at one point it all came together with a series of coincidental events that supported Tom. This related to the counselling at CAHMS (Child and Adult Mental Health Service) being stopped as his counsellor left, he hugged his mother and the end of a long exclusion and the resulting change in attitude. He was described as working well when praised and given positive feedback but also being told when he is wrong. The key worker stated that the school had worked extremely well for Tom.

Tom identified primary school as being a time when his behaviour was very poor: in particular, fighting and running around school, and not being in lessons. He stated that he did not get on with teachers. Upon transfer to secondary school he 'wanted to get it right' regarding his behaviour. He identified his family as supportive but that this influenced his home life and had no bearing on school.

He felt that teachers at secondary school gave him more room, although his behaviour during Key Stage 3 was poor. Of this time, he says that he thought in Year 8 he was untouchable by staff and could behave however he liked. He said:

"If I did not like the teacher I would not do the work."

He stated that he would work and listen to PE teachers as they could have fun but would make it clear to students when a boundary had been crossed. He was a part of the 'behaviour form group' set up in Year 8 and Year 9 to deal more intensively with a group of boys who were disrupting the learning of others and underachieving. He felt that this helped him to improve and he talked about the teacher who ran the form group as genuinely caring about how he did in school; he identified this as helping and the teacher concerned as a key figure in his improvement. He said that this

helped him to feel that he was not being given up on. He says he used to feel that teachers were against him, except his Form Tutor. He identified five other members of staff with whom he felt he had a good relationship. This, however, was not all positive for him, and about these staff he says:

“Those staff were higher up... I got away with more”.

However he did feel that members of staff were important in helping him with his behaviour and the constant input from these key people made him realise that he had to improve, although he identified that he still did not behave for staff that he did not like. Tom needs to like the subject if he is to behave and he recognises that he is not good with change; this includes a change in teacher.

Tom was asked about his five day fixed term exclusion in Year 9 and said:

“I messed about not doing any work, I was bored at home.”

Tom stated that he then realised that he was not ‘untouchable’ and he did not want to get permanently excluded. He said that he made a conscious decision to improve in school. He had a reduced time table for a while, following this exclusion, and this reinforced his desire to get back into school and achieve. He states that he then started to work well and, as he worked well, other staff saw this and his relationships with them improved. He said of being in the classroom:

“If I like the subject and liked the person I would get along.”

At this time he also began to change friendship group and he says that he got better friends. He recognises his poor behaviour in KS3 and his current friends like to remind him that he was a ‘douchebag’ when he was younger.

Tom was asked to rank order the issues that helped him the most to improve his behaviour in school and identified:

1. Staff (relationships and support from them).
2. Friends (their influence over him).

3. Work (wanting to do well).

Tom was then asked about the impact of his drug regime for ADHD (he takes prescribed Concertia) and he then re-ordered these:

1. Staff
2. Drug regime
3. Friends
4. Work

Tom then spoke about taking drugs for ADHD; he stated that when not taking Concertia: *"I am more hyper."* He feels that he can now cope better without Concertia, which he does not take at the weekends. He stated in Year 8 that he sometimes did not take Concertia and drank energy drinks: he felt this had a negative impact on his behaviour. He recognised that taking medication helped him get on the 'right track'; he then felt that he got some momentum behind his learning and improved behaviour. He says that he now feels that he is motivated to achieve and that his performance in class is not so dependent on teacher personality or his relationship with the teacher. He stated:

"I realise that even if I don't like the lesson I have to improve... I have not time to mess about".

The issues identified by Tom as being important for him achieving in school are relationships with staff, relationships with students, making a decision to achieve, being taught well, the drug regime he is prescribed for ADHD, being cared for, and not being given up on.

Critical Incidents

All of the students chosen for the research received a package of support from the school staff and outside agencies. With each of the students in this paper, their journeys through school have included a series of key moments or critical incidents where their behaviour became more positive towards the school community as a whole and towards their learning. How these incidents were dealt with by school staff and parents impacted on the subsequent choices made by the students

towards their formal education and how they conducted themselves in and around school. In all cases, with the exception of Keith, national exclusion statistics would support these students' journeys. Getting students past the 'exclusion peak' (ages 13 and 14) and into the latter part of Years 10 and 11 can be seen in these cases to be important. It is in these later years that these students began to make more positive decisions about their education.

The school systems support non-confrontational behaviour management. There are high levels of support for staff who are experiencing difficulties with behaviour. These include an 'on-call' system where senior staff will arrive in classes to assist in resolving issues of disruption and where experienced staff work alongside those who are facing difficulties in the classroom. The concept of 'a fresh-start' for students following formal school sanctions plays an important role in behaviour management, as does mediation between students who are experiencing difficulties. The school culture is one of inclusivity and problem-solving, which can be seen to support students through more turbulent times and one of not 'demonising' students

Abdul faced many difficulties on his transfer to secondary school and these were reflected in his behaviour towards his peers and staff. A key moment for Abdul was when his mother became involved in a school Somali Parents group. This group came about due to concerns regarding the lack of effective home contact with the school's Somalian community and that school contact was nearly always mediated through the mother and not the father. Previously, home contact was limited due to his mother's poor spoken English and was via an interpreter who required booking in advance to come into school. This regular contact with his mother, along with English-speaking Somali parents, helped Abdul to manage upsets better and allowed school staff to go over concerns with his mother on a more regular basis. Abdul's mother became involved in this group during his Year 9 studies (at the age of 14). Although this can be seen as an important factor for Abdul, there is also no doubt that the on-going support from key staff over his six years of schooling enabled him to engage with education at a level where he could remain in school and avoid permanent exclusion.

Keith's managed move to the target school could be seen as the critical incident. While he required support for emotional and learning needs during his time in the new school, his behaviour over this time, although not without blemish, did not place him at the same risk that he experienced in his first secondary school. The more positive relationships he managed to form in the new school supported him through his education.

Tina had many upsets, mainly out of school that then affected her behaviour in school. When her brother went to prison, this triggered a significant decline in both attendance and behaviour in school. However, this initiated increased support from the school in getting her to attend and involving her father more in her education (he was, by then, out of prison). This intervention was significant in helping her to decide that she wanted to achieve and avoid the gang with which she had become involved. As her attendance improved her behaviour and attitude to learning improved. The latter part of Year 11 and into the 6th form saw improvements in Tina, leading to her subsequent GCSE and Level 3 study success.

Joe was given a five day fixed term exclusion from school early in Year 10. He identified this as being a time where he began to consider what he wanted from education. He stated that the threat of a permanent exclusion helped him to improve his behaviour and he began to engage better in school. Upon his return from exclusion, Joe was given a package of support for his GCSE studies. Whilst ensuring that he sat all core subjects and other subjects where he was succeeding, this package also included reducing the subject areas where his relationships with staff and students had broken down. The school practice of supporting further learning and providing a 'fresh start' for students following exclusion, alongside the sanction that further disruptive behaviour would lead to permanent exclusion, were key to Joe's future success in school.

Karl had a similar story to Joe, although he was permanently excluded and this was overturned by the school's governing body. It was at this time that he decided that he would start to achieve. What supported Karl over his return was the 'fresh start' approach. All staff who taught Karl, including

behaviour support staff, welcomed him back. He was aware that any further selling or use of drugs in school or disruptive behaviour would again lead to a permanent exclusion. This is one case where the school, in hindsight, can be seen to have made the wrong decision for a student. The behaviours leading up to the permanent exclusion from school were at a level where that sanction could be seen to be correct, in order to safe-guard other students. However, the process of the permanent exclusion and subsequent appeal hearing allowed Karl to persuade the governing body that he should be re-admitted to school. The petition signed by many of his peers to reinstate him in school was a powerful tool for Karl. Although the governing body stated that this did not have an impact on their decision to re-instate Karl, it was listened to by senior leaders and taken into account. This process, and the support he then accessed (having rejected it previously), allowed him to develop more positive relationships with staff.

Mike joined the new school following a family decision to move from living with his mother to residing with his father in a new part of the country. His father, as admitted by Mike, supported him through school and was much stricter than his mother. A smaller, critical incident could be seen as his first instance of in-school truancy, where he had not attended a lesson so that he could hide and smoke a cigarette. This led to some time in internal exclusion and his father's involvement. His father supported the school's actions and disciplined Mike. Although his attendance was poor due to a badly broken leg and his mother's death, he was not again absent from classes or school days without permission.

Tina did not identify a critical incident and, from the knowledge of her from key staff and school records, there appeared to be no one crucial event that could have changed her schooling or significantly affected her behaviour. However, her choice of Dance as a GCSE option can be seen to be where changes in her attitude and friendship group occurred. Tina was, and is, a good dancer: she achieved success through this course but also came into contact with more positive students who are now seen to form her close friendship group (to the exclusion of others, whom she previously

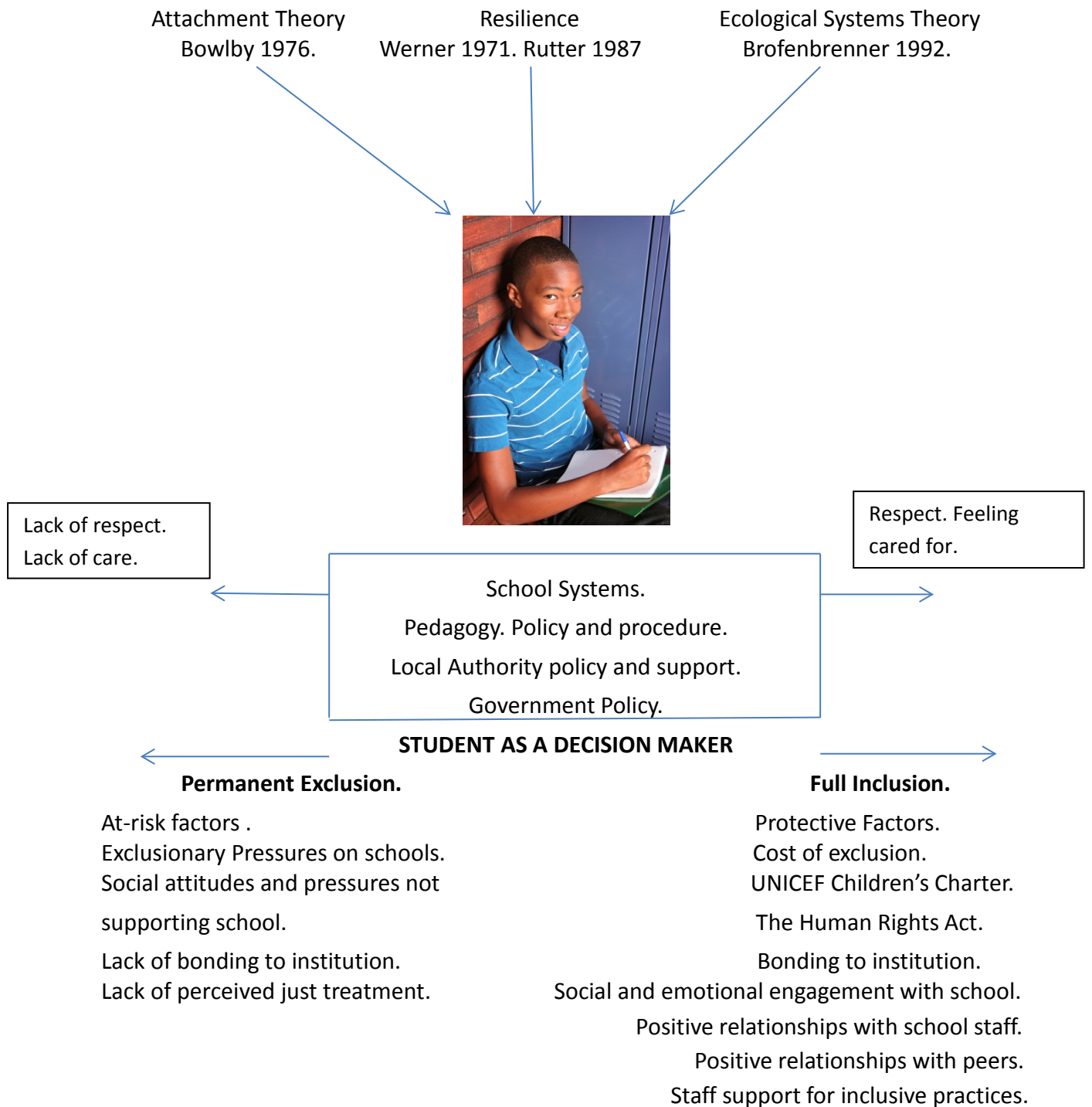
deemed to be friends, who were less positive towards schooling). It was also through Dance where some very positive relationships with staff were formed; staff who subsequently supported her through difficulties in school and the local community. The members of staff in this department work very long hours rehearsing with students and this led to regular contact with Tina's mother regarding her attendance to rehearsal sessions. Tina identified this group of staff and friends as being the support through Years 10 and 11 which inspired her subsequent exam success.

Tom, and the staff who worked closely with him, identified more than one critical incident. For Tom, it was a five day exclusion where he became bored and decided that he was not 'untouchable' and that he liked school enough to not want to be permanently excluded. This was agreed to be a turning point for Tom by key members of staff, as well as his response to information about ADHD and future achievement. This was seen as a motivating factor for Tom. Another critical moment was when his key behaviour worker persuaded him (over a number of days) to give his mother a hug on the anniversary of his father's death. This, according to these key staff, had an impact on his behaviour in school and attitude towards it.

All of these identified 'critical incidents' are different. The factor that remains the same for all students is the school and what it can offer, be it tailored support packages or a culture that understands that young people will make mistakes (and provides help and guidance to remedy these). Despite this, the school does permanently exclude. However, the desire to work through problems and reach solutions (inside a culture which takes inclusion seriously, with key staff who show genuine care for the students) can be seen to be the basis of these inclusionary tales; this has resulted in keeping a group of students included who may, in other contexts, have been permanently excluded.

Figure 2.

Diagram: Inclusionary vs Exclusionary Factors Revised



Chapter 4. Discussion of Results and Conclusion

The following table outlines the major themes identified from the research interviews and the frequency of these themes. This allows for a direct comparison between the research subjects and the relative importance of each theme, taking the research subjects as a group.

Table 2. Issues identified by research subjects as supporting them through secondary education.

	Abdul	Keith	Anna	Joe	Karl	Mike	Tina	Tom
Respect	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes
Being listened to	Yes			Yes		Yes	Yes	
Relationships with staff	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Repaying staff	Yes	Yes	Yes					
Relationships with students	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Positive body language	Yes	Yes					Yes	
Being able to deal with emotions	Yes	Yes	Yes					
Friends achieving			Yes					Yes
Staff not giving up			Yes					Yes
Feeling cared for			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Being taught well		Yes				Yes		Yes
Deciding to achieve				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Being treated fairly							Yes	
Positive parent and/or carer relationships developed	No*	Yes	Yes	No	Yes**	Yes	Yes	Yes
Drug regime								Yes

*Not English-speaking but supportive of school

**Mother, father supportive of school but not engaged with by school

The literature highlighted the areas of trust, respect, fairness and care, as well as staff knowing and valuing students, as being aspects of positive student-teacher relationships. The table above illustrates that relationships are seen as very important by the at-risk students involved in this study and the component parts, as seen in the literature, also feature strongly in their narratives. The student views regarding these component parts were not an aspect of the formal questioning but were volunteered during the interviews. This, perhaps, makes their importance even greater in how they are perceived as a factor of relationships and hence for inclusion. The literature on permanently excluded students supports the idea that a lack of bonding to aspects of the community and to schools is a risk factor; the care and respect identified by the students could be seen as encouraging this bonding to key staff which, in turn, could be an enabler for bonding to the school. The projects conducted in the USA discussed previously suggest that relationships formed in communities can develop 'bonding' in at-risk youths; these then provide a protective factor against at-risk behaviours and that can lead to permanent exclusion from school. Respect, and feeling cared for in particular, came across as important for students. The inter-personal nature of the educational experience for these students supports the literature in identifying the importance and the nature of relationships. However, there does remain potential for further research to uncover the component parts of relationships as seen by students who are at risk of exclusion from school, and whether these support the literature in terms of the at-risk cohort or whether there are, in fact, different component parts that are perceived by students to make up positive in-school relationships. The question is then whether the component parts of positive relationships that have these protective factors are experienced in the same way by students who are deemed at-risk, but are eventually successful, and by those who are permanently excluded from school.

The research methodology had a specific aim: to elicit the experiences of the at-risk students in relation to their eventual success in school, obtaining a narrative of their journey and the key issues that included the students in this process. Access to the research cohort, their school records and key staff was crucial in this process, as was a relationship with parents whose consent was required

for the research. The researcher being an 'insider' allowed for these factors to be addressed effectively. This would have been difficult for an 'outsider', as would have been gaining the trust of the research cohort sufficiently to allow them to tell their stories as completely as possible and uncover their truths. Being able to triangulate information collected via the semi-structured interviews, by interviewing key staff and using school records, allowed the research a validity that may not have occurred with semi-structured interviews alone. The semi-structured animated interviews themselves allowed for key questions to be asked but also for the students to be able to express their own views and stories within this process; this allowed questioning to probe further their narratives to gain a fuller understanding of what was important for them in their educational journeys. Setting the interviews in their school allowed for ease of access to the students, along with the familiarity and comfort of known surroundings and staff. The researcher's positive relationships with the research group helped in creating a safe and secure environment for the students involved. Interpretive methodologies, such as these used, are open to misinterpretation and researcher bias. In this research, the use of verbatim evidence and the access to supplementary information on the research group helped to ensure that the students' 'truths' were accurately portrayed and recorded with precision. The conclusions drawn are then a reflection of the students' narratives, supported by the supplementary information obtained from the school, school staff and national and international data and research.

The table at the beginning of this chapter outlines the factors that were seen by the students as supporting their inclusion and achievement in school. The issues raised in the interviews, including those aspects that the students felt were a barrier to their inclusion and success and identified by key staff as being important, can be seen to reinforce the relevance of both Attachment Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. The relationships that the students had formed with key staff and with other students were identified as an important factor for inclusion by all the research subjects. These attachments were identified by the students as being important for positive results in their secondary schooling and for the students to be able to change their behaviour. This idea of bonding

to an institution and to key adults was discussed previously in relation to the SEL programmes pioneered in the USA and can be seen as a protective factor to exclusion from school. This view is based on the research leading to the set-up of these programmes and their subsequent evaluation (Gorard and Huat See 2013). This is supported by the attachments formed with staff and students and the potential security and confidence that can be gained through these attachments as predicted through Attachment Theory (Bowlby 1975). The development of relationships and their importance, in particular when teaching students who are vulnerable, has been discussed and is supported in the literature (John 1996; Cooper et al 2000; Gorard and Huat See 2013; Smyth and Wrigley 2013). This can be seen as being of high importance in this research, with staff relationships being identified in some cases as being the single most important factor in re-engaging the student and promoting achievement and success (from the interviews with Abdul, Anna, Tom and Tina). Specific staff members were identified by these students as being important in supporting them during periods where they were at high risk of permanent exclusion from school. In the other four cases, staff relationships were seen as important, with students not achieving in classes where they did not have a positive relationship with the teacher or their peers. These four students also identified the importance of key members of staff to them; the relationships formed in these instances supported their inclusion. The idea that students would work well and behave in classes or environments where specific members of staff were was recurrent with all subjects. These relationships seem to have then enabled the students to translate these improvements in their in-school behaviour into other areas where they do not have that support. The perceived success the students achieved and the confidence gained, along with the desire to achieve (explicitly expressed by five students), may then have allowed them to make a conscious decision to reduce their at-risk behaviours.

Each of the students involved in the study had access to a key worker who had liaised with parents and/or carers during their support in school. This was used more during periods of particularly difficult behaviour but for some this was in place throughout Key Stages Three and Four. Tom, Tina,

Keith and Mike had received this type of support from Year 7 (the first year of study in secondary school). Where the home contact and positive relationships with parents had been developed, key staff identified that incidents of inappropriate behaviour could be worked through more effectively with students. There were barriers to effective working with parents in the cases of Anna, Karl, Abdul and Joe. However, it is important to note that Abdul's mother was supportive of school but would not attend school meetings due to her poor English and religious/cultural reasons. Anna's father was supportive of school in her final years, although he struggled with alcohol addiction at the time and was difficult to engage. Karl's mother had a positive relationship with school, formed through work with her daughter who also attended the school, but she increasingly became unable to influence Karl; he left home or stayed with his father, for whom the school had no contact details. It can be seen that there would have been positive messages about school from all parents, with the exception of Joe's. Ecological Systems Theory predicts that if there are conflicts inside the subject's microsystem, this could be an exclusionary factor. This was seen as important by the key staff interviewed in relation to the students involved in the research. This would then predict that the remaining subjects, where home-school relationships were less developed, would be more difficult to work with. Anecdotal information gathered from key staff would suggest that this was the case; those with positive and what could be seen as influential relationships with their siblings were easier to deal with during or following an incident of inappropriate behaviour. Contact with parents or carers made following incidents of poor behaviour were seen as being effective for the students for whom a positive home-school relationship was present. This theme was not a specific area of study but is an interesting by-product of the research, which requires more study in the cases of these research subjects. The improved relationships in school could be seen to provide more positive influences in the students' mesosystems and support positive outcomes for the students.

Student relationships were identified as important in all cases. The importance of either having friendships in the classroom or being 'left alone' to work and be in school was evident in the interviews. The interpersonal nature of the educational setting and teaching itself creates a need for

positive social interactions. Keith, in particular, expressed this as an important factor during the interview as being the difference between his previous school (where he received a managed move to the research setting, prior to possible permanent exclusion from the former school) and the school where the research took place, where he felt that he was left alone and treated in a more positive way by his peers. Tina was also clear on the subject of her relationships being often a barrier to her inclusion; difficulties with other students led to many of her incidences of poor behaviour, both in and out of school. Although Tina identified staff support as being particularly important, she recognised the impact her peers had on her behaviour; this was supported by other key staff who had worked with her.

Being cared for was a theme that explicitly came out of six of the interviews. On the theme of staff relationships, all the students who identified this as pertinent to them ventured this information. In the case of Karl, he perceived this as being vital to his eventual success. When he was not living at home and felt that he had not developed any really positive relationships with staff, his behaviour was at its worst. The subsequent visits to his father, and the care he felt he was experiencing with him, was identified as having a positive impact on his in-school behaviour. As this behaviour improved, Karl felt that certain staff showed him genuine care. Attachment Theory and Ecological Systems Theory would also support the idea of this care being an enabler for positive social behaviours.

As predicted by the DFE (2012c, 2013d) exclusions data, the period of increased exclusion risk for all candidates was 13 to 14 years of age, with the exception of Karl who was permanently excluded and then re-instated at the end of Year 10, at the age of 15. The at-risk data for these students, apart from Karl, was available and well-known during their primary phase and support was given to them upon transfer to secondary school. This support then can be seen to have helped to provide opportunities for the students to develop positive staff relationships. For Karl, his at-risk behaviours began later in his secondary schooling; he was identified as at-risk in the latter part of Year 9, being

14 years of age. The later identification coincided with family upheaval but precluded the opportunity of early intervention, and this may then have led to difficulty in forming the necessary relationships with key staff when his at-risk behaviours became serious enough for him to access the school support systems. All students, excepting Karl, were close to permanent exclusion during Years 9 and 10 (again, ages 13 to 14). The ability of the school to work through problems during this time is therefore important for the inclusion of these students. A vision of inclusion over the long-term and not viewing individual incidents in isolation, in particular over these ages, is an important theme. The school, with its well-resourced support departments, has the ability to play this 'long game' with many of the most vulnerable students it admits, working with them over their secondary schooling in a pre-emptive and reactive manner, and providing the support required to deal with an increase of at-risk behaviours if and when they occur. This 'long game' also implies accepting that at-risk behaviours will occur from the most vulnerable students and working with them to get through these until they can be reduced or the student can decide that they want to achieve in school. This then enables them to achieve at a level above national averages for identified SEN students who, on average, underachieve (nationally, a 14% gap in attainment in English between School Action Plus and non-SEN students and a 24% gap in Maths for the same cohorts; for the target school, these gaps are 9% and 8% respectively).

The DFE (2012c, 2013d) exclusions data would support the idea that getting vulnerable students through their schooling between the ages of 14-15, where there is a sharp increase in the number of permanent exclusions, is important for inclusion in mainstream education. The support for vulnerable students between these ages would seem from the research best delivered by members of staff who have developed positive relationships with the student. This forms the 'long game' previously mentioned; schools identify and work with students on secondary transfer, using experienced staff with a proven record of supporting vulnerable students. The work over the early years of secondary schooling would then form the basis for support during Years 9 to 10 where exclusions peak. The research would support this in the target school setting, with the research

candidates requiring significant support during this part of their schooling. With school budgets suffering real terms cuts, along with Local Authority funding reductions (where support for vulnerable students traditionally came), there are pressures on schools to rationalise staffing; it may be in future that experienced and effective behaviour support staff will not be available to support the most vulnerable, placing pressure on teaching staff to develop these relationships. Ensuring low staff turnover and that students are being taught by practitioners known to them may be another factor in vulnerable students succeeding. Having these known staff, with whom students have developed a relationship, is important for inclusion, as previously discussed. The target school has had very low staff turnover: an average of four teaching or in-class support staff have left every year for the last five years (at 4.2%). This may be a factor in the school's success in supporting the research cohort to achieve.

There is a theme of students choosing to behave and engage. Five of the group identified this as a factor in their achievement. Three of the cohort also spoke of a fear of failure in relation to their peers, suggesting that they had 'bought into' the notion of school success as being important. This idea then that success can be seen in terms of school achievement, and not through anti-social or confrontational behaviour, is a factor in the research with excluded students (John 1996; Maddern 2012). Decisions from students, however, are more prevalent and not just about decisions to achieve. Abdul stated that he took the very conscious decision to behave for certain staff and, in fact, perform better across the school in terms of behaviour to pay these staff back for what he saw as being treated with respect. Anna took the decision to work hard for certain staff and behave well for them due to how they had supported her in school. These decisions can be seen as being crucial to the students' eventual success; they were all articulated as positive decisions made inside the school context and due to interpersonal relationships they had formed. Keith stated that he began to behave as other students left him alone to work or became his friend. This is a relatively passive response compared to previous in-school behaviour, somehow being dependent on other students for this decision. However, based on his previous in-school behaviour this implies a clear decision to

work in school. These examples suggest that students play perhaps a more important role than with which they are credited in their approach to school success; while school staff members provide the facilities and environment, the students then decide how they will engage and take responsibility for their own outcomes. However, the data obtained from the interviews would support the claim that the environment which encourages this positive choice is created by the relationships formed with staff primarily but also with students, as well as the way in which members of staff communicate and deal with students. All too often in the literature students are the passive recipients of how the school as an institution deals with them, and when they fail they are the victims of a system that does not meet their particular needs. This research would suggest that for this cohort an active decision was taken to achieve in school. The agreement among the group that the interpersonal nature of the school experience allowed them to achieve points towards the positive effects of a school system that encourages inclusion, supports the most vulnerable students and enables positive relationships to be formed between its inhabitants. This then encourages students to make the choice to achieve. These students then have formed the positive bonds identified in the literature, the conflicts inside their mesosystems have been reduced (often involving the positive engagement of parents) and it is this that has provided the environment in which students make these choices.

The literature around student choice in education focuses primarily on systems that are set up by educational institutions to allow, encourage or support student decision-making in education (Yamashita et al 2010; Harber 2010). The benefits of this type of staff-led access to student decision-making can be seen to have positive impacts on school effectiveness, school improvement, student attendance, student productivity (Harber 2010), student self-esteem, confidence, interpersonal skills, and agency and efficacy (Carnie 2010). The choice to behave and/or learn can be seen in behaviour management strategies (Rogers 2011) which give choices of behaviour and the consequence of each choice. Students making choices that affect their education is not a new concept. However, there is little in the literature on longer-term choices to work and achieve, in

particular those chosen independently from direct staff/parent intervention. Further questions raised are that of environment, culture and school experience and how they may affect student choice. An answer to these two questions may provide an understanding of how and why some institutions succeed in working effectively with at-risk students and others are less successful. An answer in part, as illustrated by the research, may be that positive relationships that engage students on an interpersonal level, and have positive outcomes in the school environment, may lead to students making choices in their education that improve inclusion and learning.

Conclusion

Attachment Theory (Bowlby 1976) predicts improved outcomes for children who have formed relationships. This idea of positive relationships leading to improved outcomes has been used by proponents of the SEL programmes in the USA (Catelano and Hawkins 2005; Battistich 2010, for example) to improve outcomes for at-risk youths, extending into the idea of bonding to an institution as being a protective factor from at-risk behaviours. This single-site research looked specifically at the importance of relationships in school and not the school as an institution pertaining to this bonding. The interview and focus group data can be seen to support these ideas, with positive relationships in school being seen by the research subjects as important for their success. Students spoke affectionately and positively about the staff they identified as people with whom they had a positive relationship. These relationships appear to have allowed the students involved in the research to form attachments with key staff that have assisted them in succeeding in secondary education. Improved academic outcomes as a function of improved relationships in school can be seen both in the literature and throughout this research.

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1992) could also be used to predict improved outcomes in school. Turbulence, where school is involved, in the mesosystems of the students involved in the research would, by using this theory, impair success in school. Positive views of school should help reduce turmoil, particularly if these are supported at home. Research carried out into students who

are permanently excluded and students who remain in mainstream education, and their views of inclusion, add to the body of evidence that relationships between students and between staff and students have a positive inclusionary impact. The views of excluded students when interviewed, regarding their views of their exclusion, included a break-down of relationships in school, while studies of students in mainstream education point to the benefits of forging and maintaining positive relationships in the classroom.

The development of positive relationships through the use of specific interventions (notably the SEL programmes in the USA) has been seen to reduce at-risk behaviours and promote attendance and success in school (Gorard and Huat See 2013). The social and interpersonal nature of the educational experience, as identified through the literature, has been supported by the students involved in this study. The literature regarding risk factors talks of a number of these, as well as protective (from being at risk) factors, as a predictor of inclusion in education. Although there appears to be no generally shared view as to a definitive list of these factors for inclusion in education, there is overlap between all the views and, indeed, with at-risk and protective factors for other risky behaviours such as drug abuse and criminality; there is also a link to mental health. One area that is a factor for educational inclusion, which appears in all of the literature, is that of experiencing positive relationships both in the community and in school. The relative importance of these relationships in school, in particular between student and teacher, is supported through this study where students identify it as factor for inclusion.

The literature on students as decision makers in education refers to student choices in behaviour management; that is, students are given choices in relation to the outcomes of their actions to encourage them to choose positive behaviours (Rogers 2011). However, students involved in this research articulated that they made these decisions to behave in a manner that allowed them to achieve success through their relationships with staff; they opted to behave in positive ways with, or were influenced by, staff with whom they enjoyed a positive relationship.

Positive relationships between staff and students in this educational setting can be seen to have had a positive effect on educational outcomes for at-risk students. The literature largely supports the premise that relationships and bonding to key individuals/institutions play an important role in education. The cohort studied, being at-risk but achieving, are an important group to understand if inclusion is to remain at the core of state education. Perhaps the perceptions of education for this cohort can allow us further insights into what practice is effective in enabling them to succeed and, perhaps more importantly, show how students can make the decision that school achievement is an important enough goal to override the influences of the factors that place them at risk. What may be seen through this research is that it is not just what staff do that provides effective inclusion, but what pupils decide to do as well, and perhaps these ideas cannot be separated; the educational culture and environment of the institution may be the precursor to these positive student decisions. This idea then is that students are not passive recipients of what members of staff deliver, but through their engagement with this delivery they make choices that will affect their educational outcomes. The development of positive peer relationships in school was another area of importance articulated by the majority of the study group. This was seen as also providing the environment in which students felt included and could therefore become successful.

The study was single-site and in a school that confesses to pride itself in being inclusive; it could therefore be expected that the school could anticipate some success with this cohort. However, the inclusive practices are not difficult to replicate in other schools. It would seem more important that key staff in schools are adept at developing relationships with students and helping to create a school environment where staff and peers enjoy positive, productive relationships. Understanding that in such an environment, students with at-risk profiles can succeed, as well as what influences that success, can further an understanding of the impact of school culture and of key individuals on these students; therefore leading to a better understanding of what could be important in the development of inclusive education. The practices that students articulated as being important to

them were not related directly to the practice of subject-specific delivery, but about how the staff conducted themselves around the students.

Using national exclusion statistics to help guide practice would imply that specific interventions with at-risk students need to be in place between the ages of 13-14. However, what can be extrapolated from this study is that it is the development of important relationships prior to this most vulnerable age, 'the long game' if you like, that then allows for effective interventions during this period.

This research has highlighted areas for development and in particular pedagogy. The development of positive relationships both between adults and students and students and students should be built into lesson planning, school policy and the culture of the school. A well planned, resourced and delivered SEAL-type approach which extends to adult relationships could be a part of the answer in developing this culture. The need to develop a safe, secure, respectful learning environment that takes into consideration not only the academic needs of the students but also their emotional and relational needs is reflected in the interviews. The research suggests that there is transactional process involved in relationships developed in schools and that perhaps creating an environment where these relationships can develop is a priority for staff, especially those involved in work with vulnerable and 'at-risk' students. This then may assist students in making positive choices about their education. As previously argued, much of the work involved in creating an inclusive classroom may well be of benefit to all students and may not then be an approach targeted at the 'at-risk' cohort but sound pedagogy for all students. The early identification and support of vulnerable and 'at-risk' students and the development of relationships between these students and key adults and their peers can be seen to be important; this can then allow the 'long game' to develop where capacity is built with students and that can then be used if/when there are more turbulent times, in particular during years 9 and 10 at secondary school where permanent exclusions spike. Increased support for target students during these school years is important to consider. The development of relationships and trust between school staff and parents/carers can help to promote inclusion.

These issues cannot be taken out of context of whole school policies and systems which should facilitate these practices. If schools are to become serious about creating a culture where relationships are important then this should be reflected in staff employment practices; ensuring that the interview process is adept at identifying staff who are able to form and maintain positive relationships across the school. High staff turn-over may be an issue; relationships need to be developed and sustained if this capacity is to be built in and staff leaving may not help with the development of these relationships. There needs to be time invested in initiatives and interventions that develop relationships including with parents/carers, school staff may require training on the importance of relationship development and how they can promote this. The common sense in the school, the 'what we do around here' has to be at least partly focussed on respect, fairness, consistency of approach, relationship development and the protection of those relationships.

The argument that the history of education in England and Wales has been one of increasing inclusion is in contrast to the current exclusionary pressures on schools that have been suggested in this study. There is an expectation for schools to 'do everything they can' before permanently excluding but also to maintain good order in the classroom. One possible answer to this tension is then to develop positive and meaningful relationships between students and staff in schools that may then serve as an inclusionary factor.

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Appendix 1

Youth Justice Board of England and Wales (2005). At-Risk Factors:

Family Factors:

- Poor parental supervision and discipline;
- Conflict;
- History of criminal activity;
- Parental attitudes that condone anti-social behaviour;
- Low income;
- Poor housing.

School Factors:

- Low achievement beginning in primary school;
- Aggressive behaviour including bullying;
- Lack of commitment (including truancy);
- School disorganisation (being disorganised for and in school).

Community Factors:

- Living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood;
- Disorganisation and neglect;
- Availability of drugs;
- High population turnover and lack of neighbourhood attachment.

Personal Factors:

- Hyperactivity and impulsivity;
- Low intelligence and cognitive impairment;
- Alienation and lack of social commitment;
- Attitudes that condone offending and drug abuse;
- Early involvement in crime and drug misuse;
- Friendship with peers involved in crime and drug use.

Appendix 2

Reid (1999) At-Risk Factors for Truancy:

- Parents have recently separated, recently moved to the area.
- Joined school mid-way through the year.
- Missed a lot of time through illness.
- Siblings/parents been poor attenders.
- Poor attainment in school. Been teased or bullied.
- Difficulty accessing the curriculum but not having a Statement of Educational Needs.
- Being persistently disruptive.
- Having been excluded.
- Parents experiencing financial hardship.
- Exam pressure.
- Difficulty forming relationships with peers and are unpopular.
- Shy or introverted.
- Failure to do homework on a regular basis.
- Poor punctuality without good reason.
- Getting into trouble out of school.
- Poor housing.
- Parents who are uncooperative/hostile to authority.
- Parents not interested in school.
- Criminal parents or parents who have a criminal record.
- Free school meals.
- Transport difficulties.
- Poor paternal discipline.
- Poor parent-child relationships (p45).

Appendix 3

Student Interview.

Introduction: Research questions to students involved in the research and schedule.

Re-explain the study to the student. Encourage questions.

Re-explain the ethical considerations and the protections in place for the student.

Reiterate confidentiality and data storage.

Ensure that the students are aware that they can withdraw from the study at any time and their interview testimony will not be used.

The interview will take up to 40 minutes and the student may be asked for a repeat interview.

The interview will be taped and then information from it used.

The student will be asked for their name and the date will be spoken onto the tape for use in the study.

Questions:

1. Tell me about your primary schooling. How did you perform before secondary school?
2. Tell me how you performed in school during Years 7 and 8.
3. When did you feel you began to be at risk of exclusion from school?
4. What were your behaviours that you feel put you at risk of exclusion?
5. What do you think helped you begin to behave more appropriately and achieve in school?
6. Were there any key people in school who helped you to do this?
7. How do you think you would manage now in school if your teachers changed, and you had a completely new set in all your classes?
8. How do you think you would manage now without direct support from key staff?

Appendix 4

Staff Interview.

Introduction: Research questions to staff involved in the research and schedule.

Re-explain the study to the member of staff. Encourage questions.

Re-explain the ethical considerations and the protections in place for the staff involved in the study.

Reiterate confidentiality and data storage.

Ensure that the member of staff are aware that they can withdraw from the study at any time or retract their interview testimony.

The interview will take up to 20 minutes and the staff may be asked for a repeat interview.

The interview will be taped and then information from it used.

The student will be asked for their name and the date will be spoken onto the tape for use in the study.

1. Please tell me about (the student) and their at-risk behaviours.
2. Why do you think they were behaving in a manner putting them at risk of exclusion?
3. What do you think helped the student to begin to behave and achieve in school?
4. What support did the student receive from you or other key staff that you feel made a difference to the student?
5. How do you think the student would cope without this support now?

Appendix 5

Focus Group

Introduction: Research questions to students involved in the research and schedule.

Re-explain the study to the students. Encourage questions.

Re-explain the ethical considerations and the protections in place for the students.

Reiterate confidentiality and data storage.

Ensure that the students are aware that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

The interview will take up to 40 minutes and the students may be asked for a repeat interview.

The interview will be taped and then information from it used.

The students will be asked for their name and the date will be spoken onto the tape for use in the study.

The focus groups were set up to encourage interaction between the subjects and attempt to triangulate the data collected from the individual interviews and provide an environment that allowed subjects to speak more freely about their experiences of schooling, success and inclusion.

The same questions were used as with the semi-structured interviews in Appendix 3. Interaction and discussion between the subjects around the questions posed was encouraged, the interviewer being responsible for refocussing the subjects if the discussion moved away from the initial question or areas for research, and to provide new questions/prompts if the discussion faltered or halted, using the principles of an animated interview.